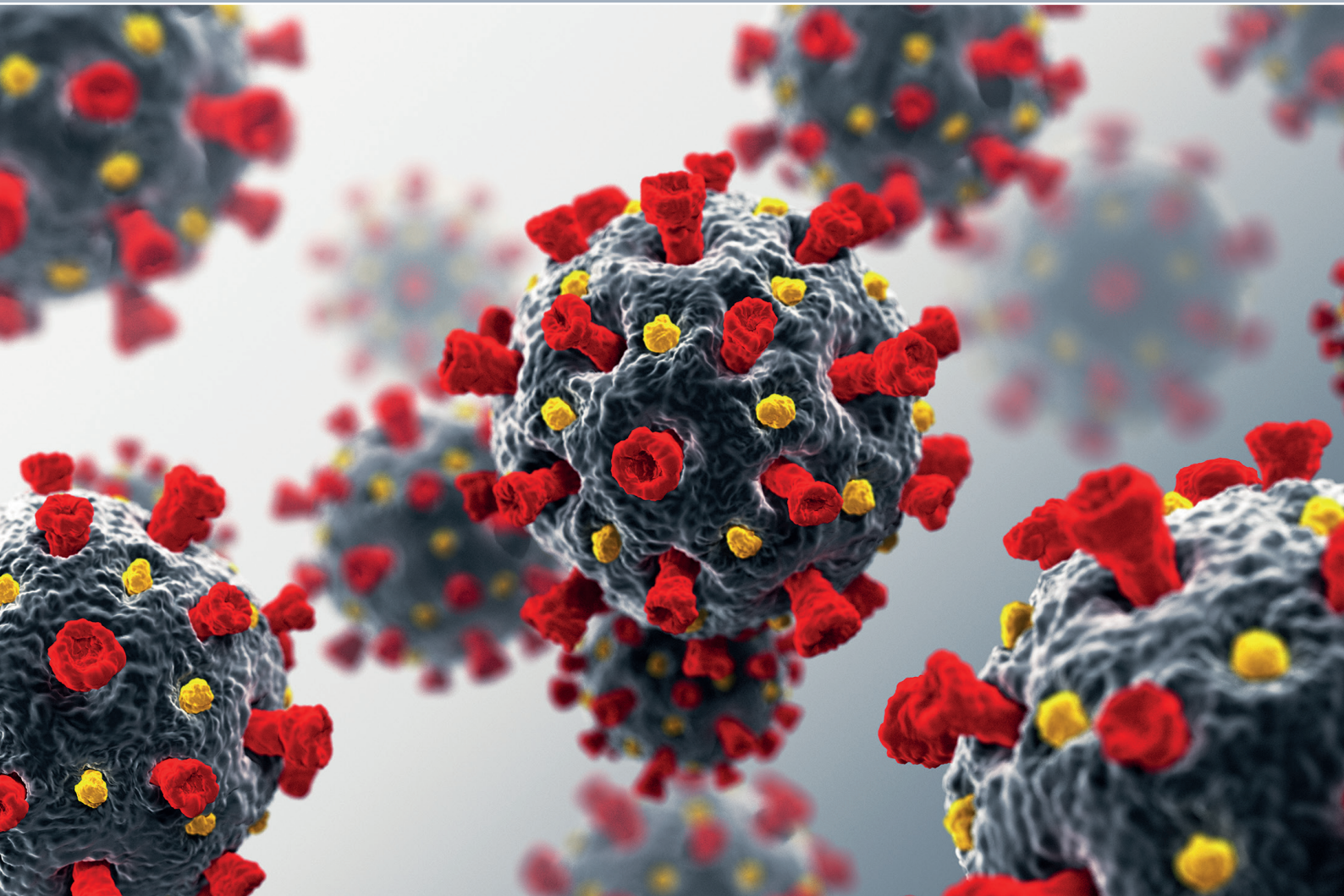




Northern Ireland Audit Office

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
02 September 2020

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Contents

	Page Number
Report Summary	3
Part 1: Background	6
Part 2: Funding the NI Executive's COVID-19 Response	14
Part 3: NIAO approach to examining the Executive's COVID-19 response	33
Appendix 1: Timeline of Executive and Departmental Announcements	34

Report Summary

- 1 The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on all our lives. Faced with the largest public health issue of our time, countries across the world have put arrangements in place to treat those infected while limiting the spread of the disease by introducing social distancing and isolation regulations.
- 2 The introduction of strict social distancing regulations, while essential in terms of disease control, has impacted significantly on society and on the economy. Governments were required to make decisions quickly to respond to the pandemic, introducing measures to support vulnerable individuals and businesses facing a major reduction in income.
- 3 On 16 March 2020¹, the Northern Ireland (NI) Executive (the Executive) announced a package of measures to mitigate against the worst effects of the disease and protect the most vulnerable in society. As NI progresses through the various stages of the pandemic, regulations and guidance have been, and will continue to be, revised. By 12 May 2020, the Executive was in a position to publish plans for working towards restriction-easing and recovery².
- 4 This overview report summarises the main actions taken by the Executive in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Disclosure is limited to NI government department initiatives estimated to cost in excess of £1 million each. At this point, no examination or assessment of the value for money, or effectiveness, of individual measures has been made. All information was provided to us by NI government departments – no audit of these figures has been undertaken. In relation to local councils, our report includes details of additional funding provided from the Executive but does not detail individual activities or report on the scale of loss as a result of the suspension of income generating activities within councils.
- 5 By 24 July 2020, the UK Government had confirmed that it would provide £2.2 billion to NI (through the Barnett formula) to fund COVID-19 initiatives. While various departmental initiatives have been approved, the precise allocation of all the funding has not yet been determined.
- 6 The total estimated cost of the COVID-19 response relating to NI, at August 2020, is estimated to be just over £2 billion. However, this excludes the NI cost of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (the furlough scheme). The approach to measuring regional expenditure is still being refined and so the cost relating to NI cannot be established at this time. When known, this will increase the total estimated cost materially as almost 250,000 employments have been furloughed at August 2020, almost 30% of the total workers recorded in Northern Ireland's Labour Market Report (August 2020)³.

¹ Statement from the Executive on COVID-19 response, 16 March 2020

² The Executive published its COVID-19 recovery plan *Coronavirus: Our approach to decision-making*, on 12 May 2020.

³ NISRA Labour Market Report – August 2020

- 7 The £2 billion estimate comprises £1.74 billion to cover the estimated cost of NI departmental initiatives ([Figure 1](#)); £216 million covering 76,000 claims under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme; £70.7 million covering payments to an additional estimated 33,600 Universal Credit claimants; and £2.3 million covering payments to an additional 7,000 Job Seekers Allowance claimants to 30 June 2020. In addition £1.05 billion, covering 26,300 business loans, has been offered under the Bounce Back Loan Scheme and the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.
- 8 The costs of responding to COVID-19 for NI to date are significant and these costs will continue to increase in the coming months as the disruption continues.
- 9 The estimated cost of funding NI departmental COVID-19⁴ response activities (£1.74 billion) will be funded by £1.28 billion received from the United Kingdom Government or the Executive and £465 million either reallocated from within existing NI departmental budgets or part of additional departmental bids submitted to the Executive. This figure is a 'best estimate' and the actual sum could vary significantly. Final cost figures will not be known until all initiatives are fully costed and the uptake on schemes is known. In addition, the total cost of activities which are expected to cost less than £1 million each is not included in this figure.
- 10 Approximately 70 per cent of total estimated costs relate to activities across three departments as follows:
 - Department of Health (DoH), working at the front line, treating infected patients;
 - Department for the Economy (DfE), offering support to local businesses struggling to survive as a result of public compliance with social distancing and isolation regulations; and
 - Department of Finance (DoF), offering a range of business and rate reliefs for individuals and businesses.
- 9 Costs incurred each year in relation to the NI Executive's response to COVID-19 will, like all public sector expenditure, be subject to review as part of our annual financial audits of resource accounts and other public body financial statements. We also intend to carry out more in-depth reviews in a number of areas. As an initial step, we intend to examine arrangements surrounding the supply of personal protective equipment in NI; the support provided to lessen the impact on vulnerable groups; and the wider impact of COVID-19 on public sector income. Further changes to our existing Public Reporting Programme will be considered over the coming months and any revisions will be published on our website.

⁴ Revised information was received from departments on 17 August 2020.

Figure 1. Estimated cost of COVID-19 response by NI Departments

DEPARTMENT	NUMBER OF INITIATIVES	ESTIMATED COST (£m)	% OF TOTAL RESPONSE
Health	9	567.7	33
Economy	20	407.9	23
Finance	6	252.4	14
Infrastructure	6	162.0	9
Communities	16	137.1	8
Education	14	116.0	7
Justice	6	54.8	3
AERA	6	40.3	2
The Executive Office	1	4.3	<1
TOTAL	84	1,742.5	

NOTE

Number of initiatives only records initiatives where estimated cost is in excess of £1 million. Estimated costs disclose upper limit of total estimated cost for each department.

Source: NI Departments

Part One: Background

- 1.1 COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. The virus and disease were first identified in China in December 2019. The immediate response from around the world has been to protect life, by restricting the movement of individuals (in an attempt to limit disease spread), and treating those infected. By 24 August 2020, over 23 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 806,000 deaths around the world had been reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- 1.2 The first case in Northern Ireland (NI) was confirmed on 27 February 2020. Efforts to control the spread across NI (as in other parts of the world) have impacted on the way we live our lives, caused disruption and additional cost to our public services and weakened our economy.
- 1.3 In NI, responsibility for putting measures in place to control the infection, secure the delivery of public services and preserve the economy falls to the NI Executive (the Executive) supported by its nine government departments. This information report provides an overview of the initiatives undertaken, which have (or will have) an estimated financial cost in excess of £1 million each, by NI departments to deal with the pandemic. Costs provided by departments represent current estimates and may change significantly as the situation progresses.

Four-Stage National Response to COVID-19

- 1.4 Following consultation across England, Scotland, Wales and NI, on 3 March 2020 the UK Government launched a UK-wide coronavirus action plan. It outlined a four-stage, national response to the pandemic, as follows:

CONTAIN	Detect early cases, trace close contacts to avoid the spread of the disease and prevent it taking hold in the UK for as long as is reasonably possible. <i>On 12 March, the Government announced that the country had moved from the Contain to the Delay stage.</i>
DELAY	Slow the spread of the disease in the UK. If it does take hold: lower the peak impact; push it away from the winter season.
RESEARCH	Better understand the virus and the actions that will lessen its effect on the UK population; innovate responses, including diagnostics, drugs and vaccines; use the evidence to inform the development of the most effective models of care.
MITIGATE	Provide the best care possible for people who become ill; support hospitals to maintain essential services; ensure ongoing support for people ill in the community to minimise the overall impact of the disease on society, public services and on the economy.

Emergency powers to deal with the pandemic

1.5 The **Coronavirus Act 2020** (which received Royal Assent on 25 March) gave the UK Government and devolved administrations 'emergency powers' to enable public bodies to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The powers are temporary: designed to be switched on and off, as necessary.

1.6 The Act has three main aims:

- to give further powers to the Government to slow the spread of the virus;
- to reduce the resourcing and administrative burden on public bodies; and
- to limit the impact of potential staffing shortages on the delivery of public services.

1.7 The devolved administrations moved quickly to use these emergency powers. In NI, the **Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (NI) Regulations 2020** came into effect on 28 March 2020, setting out:

- the legal restrictions on the movement and activities of individuals during the pandemic; and
- what individuals, businesses, places of worship or organisations can, and should, do to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The restrictions set out in the Regulations are amended as necessary as we progress through the stages of the pandemic.

The Executive's phased five-stage recovery plan

1.8 As the UK began to move out of 'lockdown', each of the four regions developed its own approach to relaxing, and ultimately lifting, restrictions. On the 12 May 2020, the Executive published its COVID-19 recovery plan **Coronavirus: Our approach to decision-making**. This set out a phased five-stage recovery plan with steps outlined against six sectors (**Figure 2**). Progression across the five stages depends on the circumstances at the time, rather than a fixed date.

1.9 The Executive, when considering whether a specific restriction or requirement should be retained, removed or changed, will apply the following guiding principles:

- Controlling transmission – relaxing restrictions only when there is a reasonable prospect of maintaining R^5 at or below 1;
- Protection healthcare capacity – ensuring the healthcare system has sufficient capacity to treat COVID-19 patients while reintroducing other health and care services;
- Necessity – retaining restrictions for only as long as necessary to address the spread of COVID-19;

⁵ The reproduction or "R" number is a measure of virus transmission. It refers to the average number of people that one infected person will pass the virus on to.

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Proportionality – ensuring the proposed changes are proportionate to the risks faced; and
- Reliance on evidence – using the best available evidence and analysis to inform any proposals for change.

1.10 On 20 August 2020, in light of an increase in COVID-19 cases in NI, the Executive reduced the numbers that can meet indoors from “10 people from four households” to “six people from two households” and reduced the number that can participate in an outdoor gathering (including a private garden) from 30 to 15. This demonstrates that the Executive will revert to tighter restrictions in circumstances where it deems that is necessary. Returning to tighter restrictions will increase the overall cost of tackling the pandemic.

1.11 As at 21 August 2020, progress for each of the sectors is as follows⁶:

- work – at step 3;
- retail – steps 1-5 complete;
- education – at step 2;
- travel - at step 2;
- family and community – at step 4; and
- sport, culture and leisure activities – steps 1 and 2 complete. Some elements of steps 3, 4 and 5 have been taken but none of the final three steps has been completed.

⁶ NI Direct website, Relaxation of regulations and recovery plan

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Figure 2: Executive phased five-stage recovery plan, with steps outlined against six sectors

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Work	Encouragement to those unable to work from home to return to workplace on phased basis subject to legal requirements and best practice arrangements being in place.	➔	Phased return to office and onsite working subject to risk assessment. Work that can be done from home should be done from home.	➔	All able to return to work subject to mitigations. Remote working still strongly encouraged and maintained where possible.
Retail	Large outdoor based retail can open (eg garden centres - though associated cafes and restaurants only able to offer takeaway/collection).	Non-food retail can open where numbers limited and social distancing and other mitigating measures in place as per risk assessment.	➔	Other 'contact' retail (hairdressers, fitness studios, tattoo/piercing) can open subject to mitigations following risk assessment.	Hospitality retail (restaurants, cafes, pubs) can open subject to risk assessment, on a limited basis to start with.
Education	➔	In addition, subject to risk assessment and adhering to maximum capacities, provision expanded to cover wider definition of key workers as workplace activity gradually increases.	In addition, schools expand provision to accommodate a number of priority cohorts on a part time basis with a blended learning approach involving a combination of in-school and remote learning.	In addition, schools expand provision to accommodate all pupils on a part time basis with a blended learning approach involving a combination of in school and remote learning.	In addition, subject to medical and scientific advice, expand early year school provision to full time basis.
Travel	➔	Public transport continues to operate but will face challenges in meeting increased demand, especially on peak services, as social distancing requirements remain in place. People to be encouraged to walk and cycle for short journeys where possible.	➔	Public transport continues to operate, but subject to ongoing risk assessment. Demand on peak services, particularly within urban areas likely to increase. Reducing and staggering demand through continued home working and staggered start times for businesses would assist as social distancing requirements remain in place. People to be encouraged to walk and cycle for short journeys where possible.	Public transport operating a full service but subject to ongoing risk assessment. Message about walking and cycling continues to be reinforced.
Family and Community	Groups of 4 - 6 people who do not share a household can meet outdoors maintaining social distancing. With the exception of people who are shielding, visits to immediate family allowed indoors where social distancing is possible. Drive through church services and churches open for private prayer with appropriate social distancing and cleaning of shared contact hard surfaces.	Groups of up to 10 can meet outdoors.	Gatherings can accommodate up to 30 people while maintaining social distancing.	A wider range of gatherings permitted including church services subject to social distancing and other suitable mitigations, such as cleaning of hard surfaces.	Can meet in extended groups subject to social distancing or other suitable mitigations.
Sport, cultural and leisure activities	Outdoor spaces and public sport amenities to open. Can undertake for example, walking, running, cycling, some water activities, golf, tennis. Drive through cinema.	Resumption of, for example, team sports training on a non-contact basis in small groups. Selected libraries open, restricted services. Open air museums re-open.	Resumption of, for example, team sports training on a non-contact basis. Museums and galleries open. Libraries open. Concert and theatre rehearsals resume.	Resumption of, for example, competitive sport 'behind closed doors' or with limitations on the number of spectators. Leisure centres and other indoor leisure facilities open. Outdoor concerts on restricted basis.	Resumption of close physical contact sports. Return to competitive sport and full use of sporting facilities. Spectators to attend live events on restricted basis. Nightclubs, concerts open on a limited basis.
Definition of steps	Outdoor activities (work and leisure) during which social distancing can be maintained for individuals who do not share a household contact and where there is no shared contact with hard surfaces.	Indoor activities involving limited contacts of less than 10 mins and interactions of only 2-4 people that maintain social distancing and prevent congregating in places for any extended period. Outdoor activities involving small groups of less than 10 people during which it may be difficult to maintain social distancing but where contacts are brief (less than 10 minutes).	Indoor activities involving larger number of individuals where social distancing can be maintained for individuals who do not share a household connection. Outdoor activities involving larger groups of less than 30 people during which it may be difficult to maintain social distancing but where contacts are brief (less than 10 minutes).	Indoor activities involving larger numbers of individuals where social distancing cannot be consistently maintained but contacts are limited and last less than 10 minutes or longer if effective mitigation is possible. Outdoor gatherings involving larger numbers of individuals where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple contacts of less than 10 minutes are likely.	Indoor gatherings of large numbers of people where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple contacts of more than 10 minutes are likely.

Source: The Executive

Organisational response to the pandemic in NI

The need for collaboration across organisations and sectors

1.12 Organisations involved in delivering the Executive's response to COVID-19 include government departments, other public sector organisations, the voluntary and community sector, and private sector organisations. Some responses require cross-body collaboration, for example, local universities, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and local businesses have formed a consortium to assist the health service with COVID-19 diagnostic testing; and the Department of Education has worked with childcare providers to develop a package of emergency childcare measures for key workers.

Collaboration across the UK and with the Republic of Ireland

1.13 Organisations in NI have also been working alongside their counterparts in Great Britain, for example, testing for COVID-19 in NI is undertaken by both local laboratories and National Testing Centre Laboratories, as required; and the four UK countries are supporting each other through 'mutual aid'⁷ for personal protective equipment. The Department of Health (DoH) in NI, in addition to working closely with public health organisations across the UK, is also in regular contact with counterparts in the Republic of Ireland. COVID-19 co-operation and collaboration between the NI and Republic of Ireland health departments was formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding⁸.

Actions by local councils

1.14 Local councils, faced with loss of income due to the closure of the majority of their income generation facilities and services, acted to streamline resources and re-prioritise delivery of their key critical services, for example, in relation to waste collection and disposal, community support, and provision of death registration and cemetery services. In addition, local government provided:

- **Situation reporting across the region** – Councils provided daily input to the regional civil contingencies structures, with daily Situation Reports being submitted by councils to the NI Hub (see paragraph 1.17 and [Figure 3](#)). In addition, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE⁹) chief executive and lead officer for regional local government civil contingencies participated in the Civil Contingencies Group (NI).
- **Support for vulnerable and isolated individuals and those within the shielding category** – Councils co-ordinated local support systems of employers, volunteers and charities via the establishment of local Community Hubs to provide emergency food support to isolated and vulnerable individuals. Some 136,000 food parcels were distributed across the region by the first week in June.

⁷ COVID-19: personal protective equipment (PPE) plan, 15 May 2020

⁸ Memorandum of Understanding: COVID-19 response – Public Health Cooperation on an all-Ireland Basis

⁹ SOLACE, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, is a national organisation that acts as the professional voice for local government. SOLACE NI consists of the 11 council Chief Executives; it works together to develop and co-ordinate services across the region.

- **Post COVID-19 economic recovery** – SOLACE has set up an economic recovery group across the 11 local councils with the intention of assisting regional thinking and implementation of recovery measures. Councils are working towards a co-ordinated programme of Growth Deals, focusing on economic recovery, and are engaged with DfE and Invest NI on wider Economic Recovery Plans.

NI Ministerial directions

1.15 Ministerial directions are formal instructions from ministers directing their permanent secretary (Accounting Officer) to proceed, despite objections, with a spending proposal. Permanent Secretaries are directly accountable to the NI Assembly for how their department spends its money, and have a duty to seek a ministerial direction if they consider a spending proposal breaches any of the following:

- **Regularity** – if the proposal is outside the legal powers, NI Assembly consents, Department of Finance delegations;
- **Propriety** - if the proposal breaches NI Assembly control procedures; and/or
- **Poor value for money** – if an alternative proposal, or doing nothing, could deliver better value for money¹⁰.

1.16 By 21 August 2020, there had been three COVID-19 related Ministerial Directions, all relating to Business Support Grant Schemes (included in [Figure 5](#) below). In all three cases, the Department for the Economy had concerns as to whether it could provide sufficient evidence of the likely value for money of the schemes or sufficient assurance on the risk of loss through error or fraud (given that the schemes were developed and implemented within tight timeframes). There have also been a number of Ministerial Directions across the other UK jurisdictions in relation to COVID-19 response initiatives.

COVID-19 governance and decision-making in NI

1.17 The Executive recovery plan (paragraph 1.8) determined that its decisions on easing restrictions depended on three key things – the most up-to-date medical and scientific advice; the ability of the health service to cope; and the wider impact on our health, society and the economy. To inform and support the Executive's decisions, a broad range of governance and decision-making structures were put in place (see [Figure 3](#) on page 13)¹¹. The main components include:

- The NI Civil Contingencies Group (CCG (NI)) chaired by the Head of NI Civil Service and attended by departmental Permanent Secretaries, the NI Hub Chief of Staff, and representatives from the Police Service for NI, the Ambulance Service and key agencies. CCG (NI) discusses key issues and shares information that has been consolidated by the NI Hub to help strategic decision making by departments, refers issues to the Executive and escalates decisions to COBR¹² through the NI Hub via the Executive.

¹⁰ *Managing Public Money NI*, 30 June 2008

¹¹ Figure 3 provides details of all governance and decision-making arrangements. Not all elements will be required to deal with every situation.

¹² The Civil Contingencies Committee or COBR (COBR is an acronym from the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms were the committee meets).

- NI Hub is the 'Operations Room' for CCG (NI). The Hub has no decision making authority, its primary role is to command, control and co-ordinate the response to civil emergencies over the COVID-19 response period. It compiles all insights and information from each department and prepares a NI-wide Situational Report (sitrep) for CCG (NI).
- Departmental Operations Centre (DOCs) are the operations centre for the management and co-ordination of the response by each department. DOCs report to CCG (NI) via the NI Hub, co-ordinating with UK government departments as required.

1.18 The Executive also keeps abreast of UK COVID-19 developments through participation in Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR) meetings on the pandemic and from work by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE). Co-operation and collaboration between the Departments of Health in NI and Ireland in response to COVID-19 was formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding¹³.

NIAO Methodology

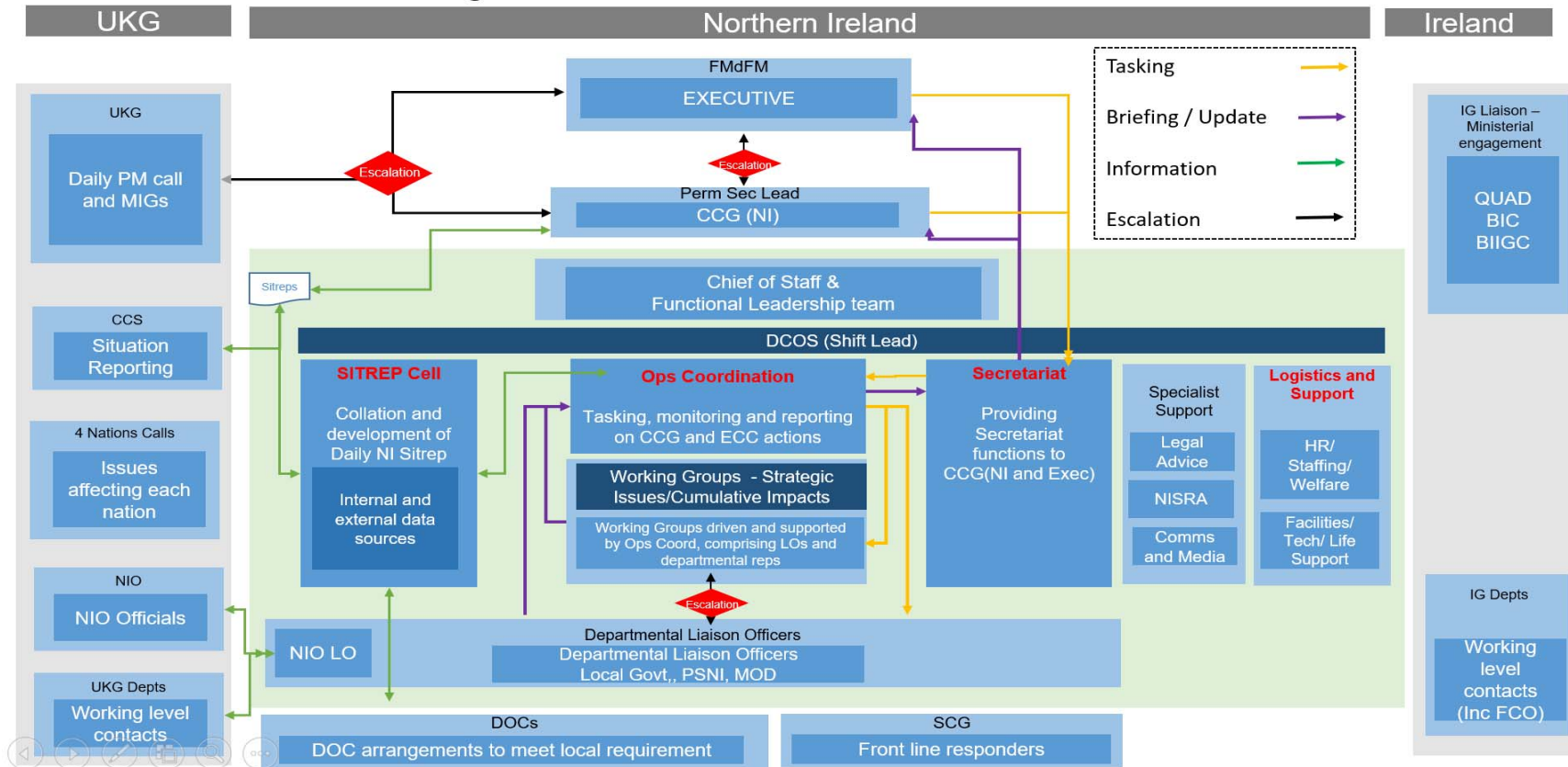
1.19 In order to prepare this report we:

- reviewed announcements made by the Executive in response to COVID-19 (see [Appendix 1](#));
- wrote to all departments and requested details of COVID-19 initiatives and latest estimated costs;
- excluded initiatives expected to cost less than £1 million although we recognise that the total estimated cost of these is likely to be significant; and
- issued our draft report to departments to allow Accounting Officers to validate the information presented.

¹³ Memorandum of Understanding: COVID-19 response – Public Health Cooperation on an all-Ireland Basis

Figure 3: NI governance and decision-making arrangements for the Executive's response to COVID-19⁸

Northern Ireland Hub Design – C19



Source: the Executive Office

Abbreviations: **DCOS - Deputy Chief of Staff** at the Hub; **Sitrep – Situation Report** collating the most up to date information, outlining the current state and potential development of an incident; **Sitrep Cell** – cell responsible for timely and accurate collation, analysis and dissemination of Sitreps; **SCG – Strategic Co-ordination Group** delivering regional multi-agency coordination to prevent or mitigate the effects of civil emergencies where there is a major and imminent threat to life (or risk of a threat to life), or the scale and complexity of humanitarian issues require urgent intervention to prevent a worsening of the situation.

Part Two: Funding the NI Executive's COVID-19 Initiatives

Departments told us that the total estimated cost of COVID-19 initiatives (over £1 million each) by June 2020 was over £1.74 billion

- 2.1 Early in the pandemic, the NI Finance Minister identified that, given the urgency of response required, the Executive's handling of pandemic funding would be outside the normal financial processes of budget and in-year monitoring exercises¹⁴. In order to respond rapidly to COVID-19, NI Ministers agreed to special meetings of the Executive to discuss, among other things:
- the budgetary allocations needed to address pressures on departments; and
 - the re-prioritisation of activities, including halting non-critical work, and reallocating resources into the wider response efforts.
- 2.2 By 24 July 2020, the UK Government had announced its intention to provide £2.2 billion to NI as a result of Barnett consequentials¹⁵ to fund COVID-19 activities. The precise allocation of all of this funding has not yet been determined by the Executive.
- 2.3 Further NI support, provided at a national level (and therefore outside the NI block grant), has been made available to cover the cost of:
- 249,900 jobs (31.6% of employment) furloughed on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme¹⁶;
 - £1.05 billion covering 26,300 business loans offered¹⁷;
 - £216 million covering 76,000 claims under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme¹⁸;
 - £70.7 million covering payments to an additional estimated 33,600 Universal Credit claimants; and
 - £2.3 million covering payments to an additional 7,000 Job Seekers Allowance claimants to 30 June 2020¹⁹.
- 2.4 Departments provided us with information on the latest estimated cost of their planned COVID-19 initiatives (in excess of £1 million each). It is important to note that plans and figures are based on latest available information and are likely to change as the circumstances surrounding the pandemic evolve. Current plans anticipate that, in total, these initiatives will cost £1.74 billion (see [Figure 1](#) at page 4) funded by:

¹⁴ *Written Ministerial Statement* from the Finance Minister to the NI Assembly, 9 April 2020

¹⁵ Funding allocated to the devolved administrations using a calculation known as the Barnett formula, a mechanism used by Treasury to automatically adjust public expenditure to reflect changes in spending to public services in England, England and Wales or Great Britain as appropriate.

¹⁶ Across the UK, 9.6 million jobs were furloughed resulting in almost £31.0 billion of claims through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. No breakdown of the total cost in each UK region is provided on the GOV.UK website. The latest publication, dated 21 August 2020, covers claims for support received by 31 July 2020 over the period up to 30 June 2020.

¹⁷ Including almost £809 million for 25,491 Bounce Back Loan Scheme offers (a demand-led scheme lending to small and microbusinesses) and £238 million for 836 Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offers (a demand-led scheme, lending to smaller businesses). Other costs relate to two additional loan schemes: the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Future Fund. Information was obtained from British Business Bank website which was updated on 7 August 2020.

¹⁸ HMRC statistics, for 30 June 2020.

¹⁹ The additional estimated caseloads are based on the actuals over forecast numbers for the period to 30 June 2020.

- additional finance made available from the UK Government (£1.25 billion);
- supplementary Executive funding of £30 million; and
- £465 million from NI departmental budget reallocations or requested in additional bids.

2.5 The Executive's allocation of this funding was based on its priorities of ensuring the health service receives the funding its needs, maintaining key public services and providing support for businesses and vulnerable people. Individual departmental COVID-19 initiatives are set out in [Figure 4 to Figure 12](#).

2.6 Departmental cost figures are '*best estimates*', and will be subject to change as the pandemic proceeds. Our analysis is restricted to main initiatives, defined as having an estimated cost of £1 million or more. We recognise that there are a number of other COVID-19 response activities which cost under £1 million or which are not yet costed. While collectively these will be significant, we have excluded them from this report.

Department of Health (DoH)

- 2.7 DoH has been working closely with colleagues in Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, the HSC Board and the Public Health Agency to put in place a range of measures in order to protect the health of people in NI during the COVID-19 emergency. DoH’s earliest priority focused on ensuring that sufficient beds, equipment, staff and medicines were available to deal with the forecast ‘surge’ in patient numbers. Expenditure forecasts provided to us in June were highlighted as being uncertain given the fluidity of the position, the need to respond rapidly and to base projections on high level assumptions. Work is ongoing to refine costs and the latest estimate of the position (as of July 2020) is provided in [Figure 4](#). This illustrates the continually evolving nature of the position. It should be noted that a number of pressures cannot be quantified at this time. DoH will undertake additional work to estimate funding requirements for a potential second surge in the autumn/early winter and is assessing the additional measures required to rebuild the sector post-pandemic.
- 2.8 DoH informed us that its nine COVID-19 related initiatives, each in excess of £1 million, have a total estimated cost £567.7 million. The 2019-20 spending was covered by reallocation of existing revenue and capital budgets. In 2020-21, £348.7 million of additional revenue funding has already been allocated from the UK Government and the Executive and £33.8 million in capital was received in the June monitoring round through reallocation of Executive funds. A further £600 million has been received by the Executive in Barnett consequentials (see paragraph 2.2 and Footnote 15) in relation to Health services, which is being held centrally pending an assessment of NI Health’s 2020-21 requirements. In addition, further costs of the COVID-19 response have been absorbed within existing budgets where, for example, staff have been redeployed from other activities.

Figure 4: DoH’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs ¹
1.	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	The supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) to support safety requirements across the health and social care sector (HSC) and its arms-length bodies including the NI Fire and Rescue Service.	Likely to be in excess of £200 million
2.	Service Delivery	Includes the cost of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased hospital admissions, including ICU admissions and capacity; • Support for adult social care services; • COVID-19 testing and contact tracing; • Emergency dental facilities; • Elective care capacity; and • Supporting the continuity of key delivery partners such as Pharmacies and Dentists. 	£100.3 million
3.	Workforce	The cost of supporting the workforce requirements of the response, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploying students and retirees to support the health and social care workforce and Community Pharmacies; • Providing overtime for specified grades of staff; • Providing accommodation to support self-isolating staff; and • Additional recruitment and registration costs. 	£86.4 million

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs ¹
4.	Surge Planning	Surge planning for hospital activity and reconfiguration, including the cost of temporary Nightingale Hospital.	£75 million
5.	Infrastructure	Additional hospital equipment including Continuous Renal Replacement Therapy machines, Ventilators and equipment in ICU and other departments; capital works to adapt buildings; IT requirements and associated revenue.	£56.0 million
6.	COVID-19 Requirements	The cost of support for the HSC Trusts, Community Pharmacy, Business Services Organisation, and the supply of drugs and equipment.	£20.2 million ²
7.	Equipment and Supply	To ensure the continued supply of essential equipment and medicines required through the period of the COVID-19 response. This includes, for example, increased costs of drugs, emergency supply and delivery of medicines to vulnerable patients.	£20.2 million
8.	Hospice Funding (DoH/DoF)	Financial support for hospices in light of downturn in fundraising income as a result of COVID-19.	£6.75 million
9.	Digital Health & Communications	To support the technology costs required as a result of the COVID-19 emergency response.	£2.8 million
TOTAL			£567.65 million

Source: DoH

Notes:

¹ Estimated costs reflect the position as at July 2020.

² This figure relates to the requirement in 2019-20. All other estimates relate to 2020-21.

Department for the Economy (DfE)

2.9 To mitigate against the effects of the pandemic on the economy, the UK Government created a number of national schemes which were accessible to NI businesses (see paragraph 2.3), for example:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (the ‘furlough’ scheme); and
- The Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

2.10 In addition, a number of NI-specific initiatives were funded through the Department for the Economy (DfE). In total, 20 DfE initiatives (with an individual cost in excess of £1 million) were activated to support local businesses. The total cost of these activities was £407.9 million (Figure 5) funded primarily from the UK Government and the Executive (£383.1 million), topped up with reallocated funds from within the departmental baseline (£24.8 million). Details of these 20 initiatives are provided in Figure 5.

2.11 DfE produced a revised 2020-21 Annual Business Plan setting out how it will address COVID-19 and non COVID-19 activity. The plan outlines how staff have been redeployed to work on a range of activities which extend well beyond the launch and administration of the large grant schemes (£10,000, £25,000 and Hardship Schemes). As yet, these activities have not been fully costed but collectively DfE considers that they will account for several millions of its budget.

2.12 DfE has recently submitted further bids to the Department of Finance for a range of initiatives designed to aid NI economic activity. A total of 28 of these bids relate to funding initiatives estimated to cost in excess of £1 million each. A number have multi-year implications. In total, DfE estimates that these 28 bids will cost more than £266 million over the period from 2020-21 to 2026-27. Each will require approval from the Executive. Details of the bids are not reproduced in this report.

Figure 5: DfE’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
1.	Small Business Support Grant Scheme	Providing a one-off grant of £10,000 to eligible businesses in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief or Industrial Derating Relief, with a Total Net Annual Value (NAV) of less than £15,000.	£245.0 million Estimated on Land and Property Services Net Annual Value (NAV) figures.
2.	Sector Specific Business Support Grant Scheme	Providing a one-off grant of £25,000 to eligible businesses with Total Net Annual Value of between £15,001 and £51,000. Aimed at businesses within the retail, hospitality, tourism and leisure sectors, subject to some exclusions.	£79.0 million Estimated on work completed by DfE in conjunction with DoF.
3.	Micro-Business Hardship Fund	Aimed at assisting micro-businesses (1-9 employees) and qualifying social enterprises, which did not qualify for other regional and national support, and facing immediate cash flow difficulties.	£33.0 million Estimated on work completed by DfE and Invest NI.

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
4.	Invest NI Support to Early Stage Companies	The proposal is to utilise Financial Transaction Capital to provide support to early stage businesses that are adversely impacted by COVID-19, and where national support measures cannot adequately address these issues.	£10.0 million
5.	Tourism NI – Game of Thrones Studio Tour	Construction on the new Game of Thrones Studio Tour was halted due to COVID-19 in March. The work directly supports 200 jobs in the construction industry and impacts on other interdependent work streams. Having certainty around the financial investment will give confidence that the construction will recommence when it is safe to do so and the economic benefits of this can be realised.	£10.0 million
6.	Apprenticeship Intervention Package	Including a package of measures, for example, supplier relief to maintain skills infrastructure; supporting redundant apprentices to complete programmes of study; and policy interventions to support vulnerable but viable apprenticeships, and apprenticeships in new areas.	£4.0 million Supplier relief estimates are based around weighted average payments issued to suppliers. Assessment of cost of additional measures is based on DfE data on furloughed apprentices.
7.	Productive Investment Capital Grant	Supporting companies to change how they work, using technology to change production and delivery methods. Particular emphasis given to projects involving automation and the adoption of digital manufacturing technologies. Targeted interventions will support vulnerable, but viable, NI businesses over the medium term (3 – 18 months) when the lockdown measures begin to relax.	£3.0 million
8.	Invest NI – Communication Campaigns	Invest NI to lead in the development, delivery and management of a rapid-response, multi-channel advertising campaign, targeting all businesses and citizens in NI.	£3.0 million
9.	Higher Education – Science Foundation Ireland COVID-19	NI specific scheme which provides opportunities for NI researchers to work on COVID-19 and develop new partnerships with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland.	£2.8 million
10.	Higher Education – Student Hardship	Addressing the projected increase in student hardships, for example, following the loss of part-time jobs or reduced family income.	£2.8 million

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
11.	Skills Strategy	Providing new on-line accredited courses giving individuals the opportunity to either up-skill or re-train over a relatively short period of time.	£2.5 million
12.	Invest NI – Financial Planning Grant	Enabling micro-businesses and small/medium sized enterprises to access external professional advice on sources of finance and prepare a financial plan.	£2.0 million
13.	Higher Education - Postgraduate	Ensuring that DfE-funded Post Graduate Students are able to complete their studies without suffering financial hardship. UK Research & Innovation is offering funded extensions to every final year PhD student they fund throughout the UK.	£1.8 million
14.	Invest NI & Intertrade Ireland – e-commerce support	Supporting businesses to develop their e-commerce capabilities in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Grant will support SMEs to obtain expert advice on online sales platforms and processes; website enhancement and/or developing an e-commerce/ digital marketing strategy.	£1.6 million
15.	Higher Education – Teaching Grant NI Universities	As a result of COVID-19 there is an expectation that local students may wish to study in NI rather than pursuing study in GB or ROI. This is required to meet projected increase and provide greater flexibility for local students.	£1.5 million
16.	Invest NI - Building Robust Supply Chains	Designed to build robust supply chains and position NI in global supply chains to build resilience in light of the COVID-19 crisis.	£1.5 million
17.	Invest NI – SME Process and Organisational Improvement Grant Support	COVID-19 has fundamentally changed how people interact with businesses. It is also clear that businesses can no longer adopt current manufacturing processes. This grant is to support companies looking to change how they work, by shifting the way they use technologies to change production and delivery methods by using approaches like robotics and automation.	£1.3 million
18.	Further Education – IT Provision for Students	Ensuring that FE learners have remote access to online learning following suspension of face-to-face delivery by colleges and training providers on 24 March.	£1.1 million
19.	Higher Education	To fund loss of Commercial Research Income in NI Universities as a result of COVID-19.	£1.0 million

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
20.	Tourism NI – Support Fund	Supporting the development of recovery plans including revision of business models and cost structures. Grants up to 80 per cent and a maximum of £20,000 for expert advice.	£1.0 million Estimate provided by Tourism NI based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £300,000 for online guidance and advisory services open to all businesses in the NI tourism sector; and • £700,000 of grant support to most viable priority businesses.
TOTAL			£407.9 million

Source: DfE

Department of Finance (DoF)

2.13 The majority of the Department of Finance’s (DoF’s) support relates to business rates relief and rate rebate relief. In total, DoF’s additional support has included six initiatives, each over £1 million, with a cumulative estimated total of £252.4 million (Figure 6) funded primarily by additional funds from the UK Government and the Executive (£213 million) with a further £11.4 million of reallocated funds from within the Department’s budget.

Figure 6: DoF’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
1.	Business Rates Relief	A package of measures including a four months rates holiday to all businesses in NI and full year rate holiday to businesses requiring additional support, for example, Retail, Hospitality, Leisure & Tourism and the three NI airports.	£213.0 million
2.	Rate Rebate Relief	LPS provides rate rebate for eligible owner/occupiers and tenants of working age who are in receipt of Universal Credit. Increased numbers of unemployed and Universal Credit recipients due to COVID-19 will result in available funding being exceeded.	£28.0 million ¹
3.	Land and Property Services (LPS income levels)	Reduction in Land Registry Services income as a result of severe contraction in the volume of property transactions.	£7.0 million
4.	NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) income	Loss of General Register Office income as a result of reduced public activity.	£2.4 million
5.	LPS Ordnance Survey income	Estimated loss of Ordnance Survey income from private sector as a result of COVID-19.	£1.0 million
6.	Supplier relief payments	Procurement Guidance Note 01/20 requires the public sector to pay ‘at risk’ suppliers if it would be value for money and important to business continuity.	£1.0 million (in first quarter)
TOTAL			£252.4 million

Source: DoF

Note 1: DoF anticipates that the cost of rate rebate relief (currently estimated at £28 million) will be funded by the Department for Communities.

Department for Infrastructure (Dfi)

- 2.14 Dfi, from the start of the pandemic, has sought to maintain essential services by ensuring essential work on transport, water and sewage infrastructure, and maintaining connectivity to facilitate the travel of essential workers and deliveries of important goods. The majority of Dfi’s additional financial support covered lost income in Translink, NI Water, Rathlin and Strangford ferries and the Driver and Vehicle Agency, and supporting businesses through deferral of tariff increases on non-domestic water rates and reduced licensing costs.
- 2.15 In relation to the £2.2 billion secured by the Executive in Barnett consequentials (see paragraph 2.2 and Footnote 15), £95 million has been earmarked for transport pressures; £3.3 million of this has been allocated to support NI airports (administered by Dfi) and a further £2.2 million has been allocated to support the NI ferry industry (administered by the UK Department for Transport).
- 2.16 In total Dfi provided six initiatives, each of over £1 million, with cumulative estimated support of £162.0 million (Figure 7). This comprised £113.9 million of additional funding from the Executive; a further £10.0 million of reallocated funds from Dfi’s budget. Further bids for £38.1 million have been submitted to the Executive for approval. In addition, the Executive retains £8.1 million earmarked for transport pressures.

Figure 7: Dfi’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs ¹
1.	Reduced demand for Translink services	Funding provided to cover Translink losses following a steep decline in passenger journeys.	£97.0 million Translink has received payment of £70.0 million from the Executive.
2.	NI Water loss of non-domestic water rates and increase in costs	Loss of income from non-domestic business closed as a result of lockdown. Deferral of tariff increases on non-domestic water rates for a minimum of six months, the aim is to support businesses that are unable to operate. Increased costs coupled with an increase in bad debts. Also losses will arise from an increase in businesses unable to pay future water rates bills.	£33.0 million
3.	Suspension of Driver & Vehicle Agency services	DVA services suspended as social distancing could not be maintained, and services were not considered “essential”. Suspension of vehicle and driver testing in NI resulted in loss of income from customers.	£25.3 million
4.	Reduced income from on-street parking	Reduction in on-street parking income and income from parking enforcement activity.	£4.0 million

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs ¹
5.	Loss of income from taxi and coach licences.	Licences, free of charge and without prior tests, for the bus and taxi industries.	£1.4 million
6.	Reduced demand for ferry services	Significant fare revenue reductions due to steep decline in passenger numbers on the Strangford and Rathlin ferries as the public adhere to Government's guidance on COVID-19.	£1.3 million
TOTAL			£162.0 million

Source: Dfi

Note 1: Estimated costs relate to the 2020-21 financial year.

Department for Communities (DfC)

2.17 As a result of the pandemic, DfC has encountered increased demand for new and existing services, and staff have been faced with adapting to new ways of working. Paragraph 2.3 provides details of additional funding, provided at a national level, to cover the cost of increased Universal Credit and Job Seeker’s Allowance claims.

2.18 DfC’s additional support has involved 16 initiatives over £1 million each, including a range of hardship funds. Cumulative expenditure is estimated at £137.1 million (**Figure 8**) including £66.1 million of additional funding from the UK Government and the Executive; a further £31.0 million of reallocated funds from DfC’s existing budget; further bids for £36.1 million have been submitted to the Executive for approval; and £3.9 million has been identified from other sources.

Figure 8: DfC’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
1.	Local councils	Funding for local councils’ loss of income and costs for COVID-19 for the period 1 March – 30 June 2020. It is likely that further funding will be provided to cover the period from June onwards.	£20.3 million (Actual to 30 June 2020).
2.	Supporting People (SP) <i>(through the NI Housing Executive)</i>	Emergency funding to providers for bank/relief staffing. Additional funding to providers facing financial challenges resulting from reductions in their social enterprise and funding activities; and additional cleaning costs and PPE.	£17.3 million
3.	Charities Hardship Fund	An Executive-funded scheme to assist charities with the impacts of the COVID-19 emergency.	£15.9 million
4.	COVID-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme	Capital funding for local councils to assist town and city centres recover from the lockdown by creating a retail experience that is safe for shoppers, visitors and workers.	£11.0 million (£1.0 million provided by DAERA for smaller settlements).
5.	Food Support	Providing food boxes to those who have been asked to shield and vulnerable citizens with no other means of accessing food during lockdown.	£10.0 million
6.	Discretionary Support	Providing a grant payment for short-term living expenses for people affected by COVID-19.	£9.6 million

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
7.	Neighbourhood Renewal and Areas at Risk Funding	Organisations received six months advanced funding on 1 April to address Ministerial COVID-19 priorities: Financial – low income and at risk due to financial stress; Food – access to food; and Connectivity – those living alone or in rural & border areas likely to experience greater challenges in accessing services.	£7.6 million
8.	Homelessness (through the NI Housing Executive)	A package of measures including Homeless Temporary Accommodation, funding to outside agencies, out of hours staffing, street audits, food provisions and central homeless team staffing resources.	£7.0 million
9.	IT Equipment	The purchase of additional IT equipment to enable staff to deliver essential benefit services.	£7.0 million
10.	Social Security Benefit Delivery COVID -19 Response	Targeted overtime to manage significant increases in benefit caseloads and backlogs as a direct result of measures put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19.	£6.5 million
11.	Housing Association Grant – additional costs	Protecting Housing Associations from increases in contract costs which are attributable to unforeseen impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.	£4.7 million
12.	Community Support Fund	Provision of additional funding to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voluntary groups and grassroots organisations (via local councils) involved in the COVID-19 response linked to food, financial and connectivity; and • support expansion of regional co-ordination organisations. 	£2.0 million committed plus further £4.5 million, subject to additional funding being received.
13.	Social Security Benefit Delivery COVID-19 Response	Targeted recovery response required to manage backlogs in benefit caseloads as a direct result of measures put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19.	£1.5 million
14.	Culture Resilience Fund	Aimed at helping individuals and organisations in the sector to survive. Support to date has been focused on the development of new work to be delivered now or following the relaxation of lockdown.	£1.5 million committed plus a further £4.0 million subject to additional funding being received.

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
15.	Accommodation	Measures required to safeguard essential staff working in all DfC sites and comply with social distancing guidelines.	£1.5 million Measures implemented, or to be implemented, to bring all DfC sites back to 30 per cent occupancy and reopening public offices while complying with social distancing guidelines.
16.	Sports Hardship Fund <i>(delivered by DfC and Sport NI)</i>	Aimed at providing financial support to sports clubs and organisations which own or rent facilities and faced unavoidable running costs during lockdown. Clubs which can avail of other NI Executive Relief Funds are not eligible to the Hardship Fund.	£1.2 million committed plus a further £4.0 million, subject to additional funding being received.
TOTAL			£137.1 million

Source: DfC

Department of Education (DE)

2.19 Education has been severely disrupted with the nationwide closure of schools²⁰ and cancellation of 2020 GCSEs, AS and A-level examinations. DE’s response, in terms of funding over £1 million, has included 14 COVID-19 initiatives with a cumulative estimated cost of £116.0 million (Figure 9). To date, DE has secured £65.2 million in additional funding from the Executive; and £23.1 million (£20.1 million resource and £3.0 million capital) has been reallocated from DE’s budget. Working with the Education Authority, the Department has quantified the additional funding required to ensure the safe return of pupils to schools on a full time basis and this has been submitted to the Department of Finance for consideration by the Executive.

Figure 9: DE’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
1.	Free School Meal Entitlement	Providing financial assistance for families in receipt of free school meals (£2.70 per day per child).	£37.6 million Estimate covers 23 March to 30 June (including Easter break) and September to 23 October 2020. Includes £0.4 million (Youth) Eat Well to Live Well funding.
2.	Summer Activity to Support Children and Learning	Additional support for specific groups of underachieving pupils to help to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 school closures and limit the damage to children’s long-term opportunities.	£12.4 million Includes £0.4 million (Youth) Eat Well to Live Well funding.
3.	Summer Food payment Scheme	Extension of the free Entitlement scheme for July and August 2020	£12.0 million Estimate covers July and August 2020.
4.	Childcare Support Scheme	Ensuring key workers and vulnerable children continue to access childcare, and sustaining day-care providers who have had to close.	£12.0 million Estimate covers April to June 2020.
5.	Childcare Recovery Support Fund	Providing a level of financial support to assist the re-opening of childcare provision in July and August 2020 to ensure childcare is available as far as possible for parents who need it, to support economic recovery and return to work in line with the Executive Recovery Plan.	£10.5 million Estimate covers July and August 2020.
6.	Education Authority (EA) pressures – block grant	Providing funding to meet Education Authority financial pressures such as cleaning costs and the loss of income during school closure periods.	£8.7 million

²⁰ Schools remained open for children of key workers and vulnerable children.

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
7.	Income Support Scheme for Substitute Teachers	Providing support to substitute teachers who worked between 1 January 2020 and 31 March 2020 but no longer have access to work.	£5.0 million Cost estimate covers top-up over the period April to June 2020 to ensure income is at least 80 per cent of that earned in period January to March 2020.
8.	School Uniform Grants	Providing financial assistance to cover increasing number of families eligible for school uniforms.	£4.0 million
9.	Loan of IT devices to disadvantaged pupils	Ensuring that as many disadvantaged pupils as possible have access to a suitable IT device in order to access online learning.	£3.0 million
10.	Education Authority pressures – earmarked funds	Providing additional funding to meet financial pressures of applying government guidance on COVID-19, including use of PPE, training of staff, signage, and cleaning and sanitising the workplace.	£2.8 million
11.	Support for Canteen Staff in Voluntary Grammar/Grant Maintained Integrated Schools	Providing funding support to cover the costs incurred by canteens - staff and other costs.	£2.5 million
12.	Preparatory Schools	Providing financial support to schools to cover loss of tuition fee income.	£2.3 million
13.	Boarding Schools	Providing financial support to schools to cover loss of boarding fee income.	£1.6 million
14.	Alternative examination arrangements	Providing for the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) cost of developing and implementing alternative arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels and vocational qualifications and providing advice to DE on options for examinations in the next academic year.	£1.6 million
TOTAL			£116.0 million

Source: DE

Department of Justice (DoJ)

2.20 The majority of DoJ’s COVID-19 financial support was directed towards supporting the Police Service for NI (PSNI) and the NI Prison Service. It estimated the total cost of its six COVID-19 related initiatives to be £56.2 million (£5.1 million in 2019-20 and £51.1 million in 2020-21) (Figure 10). This comprised £25.0 million additional funding from the Executive in 2020-21; £15.0 million of reallocated funds from the reduction of legal aid payments; £10.6 million funding released through various easements throughout DoJ’s budget; and bids for £5.6 million have been submitted to the Executive for approval. In addition, a bid has been made recently to bring forward capital projects of £1 million into 2020-21 to aid the economic recovery of the construction industry. Uncertainties about the scale of future Court business for the rest of 2020-21 make it hard to predict the future levels of lost income from Court business or any further reductions in legal aid payments.

Figure 10: DoJ’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
1.	Police Service NI	Pressures in maintaining critical services; increased costs from contractors; and an increase to the levels of untaken annual leave as a result of the pandemic.	£13.0 million
2.	NI Courts and Tribunals Service	Potential loss of income as a result of the limitation of fee earning court business; additional court judiciary recovery costs will be incurred to clear the backlog of cases; additional cleaning costs; and additional COVID-19 related costs on capital projects.	£12.1 million
3.	NI Prison Service	To maintain critical services: overtime; hygiene requirements; adjustments to the prison estate; additional resources for prisoners; IT equipment for remote working; and an increase to the levels of untaken annual leave as a result of the pandemic.	£11.5 million
4.	PPE	PPE across the DoJ (including Agencies and Arm’s Length Bodies) to ensure staff and public safety.	£11.0 million
5.	Project Dignity - NI Temporary Resting Place	Providing a temporary resting place with additional body storage capacity (for around 3,500 bodies) to cope with the risk that the number of deaths caused by the pandemic would exceed normal capacity.	£4.9 million
6.	Other	Mainly for IT costs to enable remote/home working; additional cleaning and hygiene requirements; overtime and additional staff costs to maintain frontline services; and risk of provider failure, despite interim payment scheme implemented in Legal Services Agency.	£2.3 million
TOTAL			£54.8 million

Source: DoJ

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

2.21 One of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA’s) main priorities from the outset was to support the supply of food, animal feed and produce from the agri-food sector. To achieve this, DAERA provided support to the dairy, beef and horticulture sectors which experienced large falls in prices. DAERA provided six COVID-19 support initiatives, each over £1 million, with a cumulative estimated cost of £40.3 million (Figure 11). This comprised £30.3 million additional funding from the Executive and a further £10.0 million of reallocated funds from DAERA’s budget.

Figure 11: DAERA’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
1.	Market Interventions in the Agri-Food Sector	Package of market support measures to assist the dairy, beef and horticulture sectors which have faced complex challenges and experienced a fall in prices.	£28.6 million
2.	Waste Management	Waste measures to support local councils to help cover higher waste collection, treatment and disposal costs.	£4.1 million
3.	Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Income shortfall	Funding for shortfall of capital income generated by AFBI as a result of the pandemic.	£2.8 million
4.	Digital Services	Capital IT response to facilitate departmental staff home working.	£2.0 million
5.	Fishing	Scheme to support the fishing industry which has been affected by social distancing measures and the collapse of the European and domestic fish markets which have made trading virtually impossible.	£1.5 million
6.	AFBI COVID-19 Testing Kits	Covering the cost of kits for the provision of COVID-19 testing services.	£1.3 million
TOTAL			£40.3 million

Source: DAERA

The Executive Office (TEO)

2.22 The Executive Office’s support comprised advertising and public information campaigns, daily press conferences and running costs of the NI Hub (paragraph 1.14 and **Figure 2**) totalling an estimated £4.3 million (**Figure 12**). This comprised £0.5 million of additional funding from the Executive and a further £0.5 million of funds reprioritised from TEO’s budget to help address the budget pressure created by these initiatives. Further bids for £3.3 million have been submitted for approval.

Figure 12: TEO’s initiatives in excess of £1 million in response to COVID-19

	Type of support	Description	Estimated Costs
1.	TEO response measures to COVID-19 pandemic	NI Executive advertising and public information campaign for COVID-19. Daily press conference costs. NI Hub running costs.	£4.3million
TOTAL			£4.3million

Source: TEO

Part Three: NIAO Approach to Examining the Executive's COVID-19 Response

- 3.1 This report provides details of the major departmental initiatives and activities across NI departments created in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The estimated cost of these initiatives is difficult for departments to quantify given the uncertainties over the future of the pandemic. As a result, figures provided are the most up-to-date cost projections. These will be subject to change.
- 3.2 Actual costs incurred each year in relation to the NI's response to COVID-19 will, like all public sector expenditure, be subject to review as part of our annual financial audit of resource accounts and other public body financial statements. In addition to this, given the volume and nature of the expenditure, over time we intend to carry out more in-depth reviews in a number of areas.
- 3.3 The COVID-19 crisis has required departments to act quickly to protect public health, ensure continuity in the delivery of public services and to implement measures to sustain our economy. Our future work is likely to be aimed as assessing how departments responded to major challenges, such as the need to:
- ensure the safety of staff and the public;
 - provide immediate support for individuals facing financial hardship and support for local businesses by offering a range of grants and reliefs;
 - suspend a number of income-generating public sector activities in order to concentrate efforts elsewhere and ensure adherence to social distancing regulations; and
 - make decisions at an unusually fast pace to respond as the crisis develops.
- 3.4 As an initial step, we intend to examine arrangements surrounding the supply of personal protective equipment in NI; the support provided to lessen the impact on vulnerable groups; and the wider impact of COVID-19 on public sector income. Over the coming months, we will consider the need to further revise our existing Public Reporting Programme. Revisions to our plans will be notified to departments and published on our website.

Timeline of Executive and Departmental Announcements

February 2020	
Assembly Health Committee agrees to make Coronavirus (COVID-19) a Notifiable Disease.	27 February 2020
NI now has full access to NHS 111 helpline service on COVID-19 – this replaces the localised helpline number.	28 February 2020
March 2020	
Benefit payments will still be paid for people self-isolating who cannot attend appointment at their Jobs and Benefits Office or medical assessment centre.	11 March 2020
NI Health Minister meets Secretary of State for Health and Social Care UK at Stormont for discussions on COVID-19 threat, NI Chief Medical Officer also attended the meeting.	13 March 2020
Health Service starting to curtail activity to free up resources for the most seriously ill COVID-19 patients; DoH and British Medical Association agreed measures to release additional capacity in General Practice.	
Advice on hospital and other care setting visits.	
Meeting of Irish Government and NI Executive Ministers, and their Chief Medical Officers, concerning North South co-operation to deal with COVID-19.	14 March 2020
£100 million emergency rates package for businesses announced.	17 March 2020
Former health care professionals are invited to re-register; Third year nursing and midwifery students will be redeployed to clinical care; final year QUB medical students can join the provisional medical register.	19 March 2020
A new home childcare scheme announced to meet the childcare needs of keyworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic.	22 March 2020
UK announces job retention scheme to furlough workers.	23 March 2020
All non-essential businesses closed. New movement restrictions (lockdown) announced by Prime Minister.	
All schools, nurseries and colleges closed from today.	
Discretionary Support Scheme enhanced to support people affected by COVID-19.	24 March 2020
Additional funding of £10.5 million to support the pressures faced by community pharmacies.	

March 2020 (continued)	
The first Primary Care COVID-19 Centre launched for patients who are very unwell, are suspected of having COVID-19 and require medical attention.	25 March 2020
UK announces support package for self-employed workers.	26 March 2020
Next phase of emergency planning for COVID-19 surge – includes prioritisation of patient care; reconfiguration of hospital services; urgent discharge of medically fit patients; an end to general hospital visiting.	
Direct payments to families with children on free school meals announced.	
A new COVID-19 NI information app is launched.	27 March 2020
Praise for local companies who responded to request for help in sourcing critical items such as ventilators, PPE, hand sanitisers.	29 March 2020
The online HSC Workforce Appeal received 4,031 people registering in first 24 hours, including 931 clinical staff.	

April 2020	
£1.5 million support for fishing industry announced.	3 April 2020
Emergency measures approved for sourcing additional temporary accommodation for the homeless.	6 April 2020
Weekly delivery of food boxes launched.	
NI received 5.5 million items of PPE, including 1.3 million aprons and 0.3 million respiratory masks.	
Memorandum of Understanding agreed between Irish Government and NI Executive.	7 April 2020
Health Minister tours NI's first Nightingale Hospital in Belfast City Hospital.	
Some routine screening programmes paused to allow staff and resources to be reallocated to tackling COVID-19.	
Communities Minister provides £1.5 million to local councils to help in support of COVID-19 measures.	8 April 2020
NI Executive agrees additional £300 million for COVID-19 response.	9 April 2020

April 2020 (continued)	
A new volunteer-led service to deliver medicines to patients during COVID-19 crisis.	10 April 2020
Agriculture and Health Ministers approves the use of Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute laboratories to test samples of suspected COVID-19 cases.	
Executive urges public to stay at home and save lives over Easter.	16 April 2020
Water and sewage bills for business and non-domestic customers held back until July 2020.	
New email contact for HSC staff to raise Personal Protective Equipment concerns.	17 April 2020
Small Business and Retail, Tourism and Hospitality grant schemes announced.	18 April 2020
DoH launches an online version of COVID-19 NI app.	21 April 2020
£4.5 million redirected into rural communities in response to the COVID-19 emergency.	24 April 2020
30,975 food boxes delivered to the 24 council distribution centres in the three weeks since the service started.	
Communities Minister announces funding of £1.5 million to support individuals and organisations in the arts sector.	
Infrastructure Minister announces up to £17 million in financial support available to ferry operators to keep supply chains open.	25 April 2020
Extensive advertising campaign launched at slowing spread of COVID-19.	
Executive adopts new powers in response to threat of COVID-19.	28 April 2020

May 2020	
Provisions put in place to enable each district council to hold meetings remotely.	1 May 2020
£5.7 million, jointly funded by Executive and Dept. for Transport, to secure air connectivity from Belfast City Airport and Derry City Airport.	
Education and Health Ministers outline £12 million package for emergency childcare provision.	
NI care homes to get £6.5 million additional funding for extra staffing and cleaning.	3 May 2020
Executive agrees a £700 million investment package to help rebuild the economy after the COVID-19 emergency.	

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

May 2020 (continued)	
Economy Minister announces a £40 million Hardship Fund available for microbusinesses who can't avail of existing schemes.	5 May 2020
Inaugural meeting of the Tourism Recovery Working Group.	
Five NI hospices to receive £6.75 million to offset the loss of donations and revenue from retail outlets.	6 May 2020
Executive publishes Coronavirus recovery strategy.	12 May 2020
Health Minister announces that testing for COVID-19 in the care home sector to be significantly expanded.	13 May 2020
£12 million package of measures provided to support childcare sector.	
Garden centres allowed to reopen and marriage ceremonies involving the terminally ill will be permitted.	14 May 2020
Socially distanced gatherings of up to six people permitted and places of worship can be reopened for individual prayer.	18 May 2020
£12 million income support scheme for substitute teachers.	
Local councils given £20.3 million to alleviate financial pressures.	
£10 million for Supporting People to fund housing support for the most vulnerable people to live independently.	19 May 2020
£213 million rates relief package for sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 lockdown.	
£25 million funding for the beef and dairy sectors.	20 May 2020
Up to 24,000 devices could be provided to pupils for blended learning.	21 May 2020
£0.36 million support package to NI's aquaculture sector.	
Health Minister welcomes anti-viral drug (Remdesvir) being available for the treatment of COVID-19.	26 May 2020
Plans to roll out active travel initiatives promoting cycling and walking as restrictions are gradually lifted.	27 May 2020

June 2020	
Everyone over the age of 5 exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 will now be eligible for testing.	1 June 2020
Care homes to receive additional £11.7 million enabling them to provide sick pay for staff.	2 June 2020

Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

June 2020 (continued)	
All non-essential goods retailers can open.	12 June 2020
£15.5 million fund to help local charities opens.	15 June 2020
Summer Food Payment Scheme announced for months of July and August, for those children entitled to free school meals at 30 June.	18 June 2020
Finance Minister allocates £250 million as part of 2020-21 June monitoring round process.	30 June 2020

July 2020	
Finance Minister welcomes the additional £162 million of funding towards the COVID-19 response, comprising £46 million for economic recovery and a further £116 million for COVID-19.	8 July 2020
Health Minister announces that HSC Trusts are planning to rebuild health and social care over the summer, to increase services as soon as possible and prepare for potential future surges of COVID-19.	10 July 2020
"StopCOVID NI" proximity App for smartphones is due to go live imminently.	
Finance Minister welcomes the additional funding for the NI Executive and the guarantee that the Executive will receive a minimum of £2.2 billion for its COVID-19 response.	24 July 2020
£11 million announced to support town and city centres in their economic recovery.	27 July 2020
COVID-19 charities fund to reopen on 3 August 2020 for a further three weeks.	29 July 2020
Rural Affairs Minister launches a £1.7 million stimulus fund to help rural and micro businesses expand, innovate and sustain rural communities.	
Health Minister urges the public to download and activate the new mobile phone app to alert users if they have been in close contact with other users who have tested positive for COVID-19.	30 July 2020
Public health advice is underlined as shielding is paused.	
Justice Minister announces further easing of prison restrictions related to COVID-19.	31 July 2020
Health Minister officially launched the new StopCOVID NI app.	

August 2020	
Finance Minister announces that 25,000 NI businesses are benefitting from the 12 month rate holiday introduced by the Executive.	4 August 2020
Communities Minister announces £3.2 million in additional funding to Councils to allow them to support the voluntary and community sector.	5 August 2020
Infrastructure Minister welcomes the resumption of a normal schedule on the Strangford Ferry from Monday 10 August 2020.	6 August 2020
Education Minister announces he wants all schools to return to more normal patterns of operation and attendance from the week beginning 31 August 2020.	
Health Minister warns that the latest total of new COVID-19 cases provides a “wake-up call for the complacent”.	
The Executive announces that the use of face coverings in certain indoor settings will be mandatory from Monday 10 August 2020.	
The Executive announces that theatres and concert halls can re-open from 8 August 2020.	
Ministers have agreed that a cross-departmental high street task force will be established to consider and address key issues facing businesses. While some easing of restrictions has been approved by the Executive, it decided to put on hold the reopening of bars, pubs and private members' clubs selling only drink. A new indicative date of 1 September was given.	
Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser warn against carelessness and fatigue as the number of COVID-19 cases rises.	9 August 2020
Health Minister welcomes the return of services at the Regional Fertility Centre on a phased basis from 10 August 2020.	10 August 2020
Executive urges public to “Wear one for Everyone” as shoppers are legally required to wear face coverings from today.	
Communities Minister announces a further £10.8 million for the voluntary and community sector to assist recovery from and prepare for any possible second wave of COVID-19.	
Health Minister urges people to remain on high alert against COVID-19 as a death is recorded for the first time in over a month.	10 August 2020

August 2020 (continued)	
Health Minister announces that the "StopCOVID NI" app has had almost 230,000 downloads and urging those who have the app to share it with family and friends.	11 August 2020
Health Minister expresses concern at the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in Northern Ireland.	
Education Minister welcomes the decision that robust student performance from mock examinations will be used as evidence in any appeal.	
The Business Services Organisation publishes new experimental statistics on Personal Protective Equipment issued to the Health and Social Care sector in NI.	12 August 2020
Education Minister publishes revised guidance setting out how schools should plan for the new school day.	13 August 2020
Economy Minister announces a new law to ensure that furloughed employees who are made redundant receive statutory redundancy pay based on their normal wages, rather than a reduced furlough rate.	
Finance Minister announces allocations of £123 million from COVID-19 funding including: £47 million to enable schools and further education facilities to safely reopen; £17 million for apprenticeships; £ 2 million for social enterprises; £2.5 million towards safely reopening the voluntary and social enterprise sectors.	13 August 2020
Infrastructure Minister extended the automatic renewal of vehicle licenses for buses and taxis.	
Health Minister expresses sadness for COVID-19 death and rise in cases.	14 August 2020
DfE Trading Standards Service warns travel businesses to treat consumers fairly or face enforcement action.	
Education Minister announces that all A-level and AS candidates taking qualifications through the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) will now be awarded the higher of the grade submitted by their centre or the grade calculated by CCEA.	17 August 2020
Communities Minister highlights the importance of £7 million fund to support Social Enterprises.	18 August 2020
Health Minister confirms that the public cannot give into fatigue or complacency as a further COVID-19 death is confirmed.	

August 2020 (continued)	
Justice Minister confirms that jury trials have recommenced in NI for the first time since lockdown.	19 August 2020
Communities Minister announces an extension to protect private renters from eviction during the pandemic, to 31 March 2021.	
Economy Minister voices her disappointment in the delay in vocational qualifications results but said that learners will receive the grades they deserve.	20 August 2020
Executive agreed changes to the Coronavirus Health Regulations to reduce the number who can gather indoors and outdoors, including domestic settings.	
<p>Education Minister outlines a £42 million package of funding to help support the reopening of schools. The funding is for the first term of the new academic year and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £17.5 million towards the cost of substitute teachers and other school expenditure; • £6.4 million for PPE; • £5 million for school wellbeing initiatives; • £3.1 million for home to school transport; • £2.8 million for safe re-opening of non-statutory pre-school settings; • £2.4 million support for online learning; and • £1.4 million to support special educational needs. 	24 August 2020