

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

2 OCTOBER 2020

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-second North South Ministerial Council Health and Food Safety meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh and by videoconference on 2 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Stephen Donnelly TD, Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health, and Declan Kearney MLA, Junior Minister. Minister Donnelly chaired the meeting.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

2. The Council renewed its expression of 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.
3. Ministers welcomed the close and productive cooperation that has taken place between Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and health administrations, North and South, to deliver an effective public health response.
4. The Council noted that since the meeting of senior representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, and their Chief Medical Officers, at the NSMC Secretariat offices in Armagh on 14 March to review the situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and senior representatives from both Administrations have continued to meet regularly to discuss the ongoing Covid-19 response.

5. Ministers noted that the twenty-fourth Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), held at Dublin Castle on 31 July 2020, was briefed by the Chief Medical Officers on the public health situation and on ongoing cooperation in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
6. The Council noted that Chief Medical Officers met on 25 September to review the ongoing response to the pandemic, including the particular challenges being faced in the North West region and the joint statement issued following that meeting.
7. Ministers recalled the Memorandum of Understanding on Public Health Cooperation on Covid-19 Response agreed between Departments of Health, North and South, on 7 April.
8. The Council noted the further Memorandum of Understanding for the sharing of anonymous 'diagnosis keys' generated by each jurisdiction's covid-19 Proximity Apps agreed between Departments of Health, North and South, on 30 July.
9. Ministers welcomed the achievement of interoperability, on an all-island basis, of the apps deployed in each jurisdiction.
10. The Council noted that Health Ministers will continue to meet, both within the NSMC and outside the structures of the Council, to discuss the response to the pandemic.
11. Ministers agreed that officials from both jurisdictions are committed to building on the experience and the relevant learnings from the first phases of the pandemic and will continue to 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

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

REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME

13. The Council noted the current work programme in the health sector and welcomed progress made to date in the relevant areas. Ministers noted that an updated paper on the review of the work programme will be brought to the next meeting in this sector.
14. Ministers noted that a review of the current Child Protection work programme, which was underway in 2016, has recommenced and a draft revised all-island work programme will be presented at a future health sectoral meeting.

HEALTH AND CHILD PROTECTION

UPDATE ON COOPERATION IN THE HEALTH SECTOR SINCE 2016

15. The Council noted that the all-island Congenital Heart Disease Network has successfully delivered its initial work programme and will move forward with the next

phase of establishing the academic partnership and developing the research programme.

16. Ministers noted that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Beaumont Hospital in Dublin and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has been signed for a North-South living donor exchange kidney transplant service.
17. The Council noted the success of the North West Cancer Centre in providing radiotherapy services for the whole North West region and delivering the highest standards of specialist care with the latest high tech radiotherapy equipment.
18. The Council noted that patients with ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) from County Donegal continue to be transferred to Altnagelvin Hospital, for Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (pPCI) treatment.
19. Ministers noted that both jurisdictions intend to maximise opportunities of the new cross-border structural funds programme (PEACE Plus) which is currently in development.
20. The Council noted the updated Memoranda of Understanding in place between the ambulance services to provide for cross-border assistance in the management and resourcing of emergency and urgent calls, and declared major incidents.
21. Ministers noted that Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) cross-border health and social care partnership is continuing to benefit from EU funding to support cross-border service delivery and is currently leading four health strand INTERREG VA projects and partnering in a fifth, including projects focusing on acute services, mental health, population health, primary care, and older people and children's services, with a total allocation of ca. €37 million.
22. The Council noted that the potential for collaboration between Ireland and Northern Ireland on the implementation of appropriate aspects of their drug and alcohol strategies will be explored.
23. They also noted that the North/South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group which was established to contribute to reducing alcohol related harm on the island of Ireland has continued to meet since 2016.
24. Ministers noted the update on smoking initiatives in both jurisdictions including, Tobacco Free Ireland, Electronic Cigarettes and banning smoking in cars.
25. The Council noted that in February 2020, the Department of Health (N) published a mid-term review of its tobacco control strategy, and that the development of the strategy was assisted by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland who provided a comprehensive evidence review and facilitated stakeholder engagement exercises.
26. Ministers noted that the various research initiatives under the Physical Activity Plan have been progressed on an all-island basis, including the Irish Physical Activity Collaboration (iPARC), and the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study, led by Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland.

27. The Council noted that suicide prevention continues to be a key priority in both jurisdictions, and that the DOH (N) Protect Life 2 Suicide Prevention strategy is being implemented and new structures have been established to drive progress.
28. Ministers noted that a Memorandum of Understanding has been developed between the Health Service Executive (HSE), Ireland, Psychosocial Response to Covid-19 Programme and the Department of Health (N), Mental Health and Resilience Strategic Working Group to engage in cooperation and collaboration in psychosocial response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

CHILD PROTECTION

29. The Council noted that the cross border Steering Group of officials, co-chaired by the Department of Health (N) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (S), continues to meet to promote a coordinated approach on child protection issues.
30. The Council noted the update provided 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.

FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD (*safefood*)

PROGRESS REPORT

31. The CEO of *safefood* provided an overview of the work of *safefood* and made reference to high level achievements and campaigns including successful campaigns related to handwashing, childhood obesity, cooking chicken and cooking burgers.
32. The Council noted that *safefood* has developed and distributed various resources in educational settings.
33. Ministers noted that *safefood* has engaged with customers on social media and carried out research in relation to food allergens, folate status in women, lifetime costs of childhood overweight and obesity, food portion sizes, treat foods and the impact of climate change on dairy production.
34. The Council noted that *safefood* has developed networks including Community Food initiatives, Knowledge Networks, and the all-island obesity action forum.
35. The Council noted *safefood* attendance at the Balmoral show and Ploughing Championships highlighting the Childhood Obesity Campaign.
36. The Council noted the progress of 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.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

37. The Council noted *safefood*'s Annual Reports and Accounts for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, which have been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

38. Ministers noted that *safefood* has prepared a draft 2020-22 corporate plan which includes a 2020 business plan and that, following approval by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers, it will be submitted to NSMC for approval at the earliest opportunity.
39. The Council noted that *safefood*'s business plans for 2017, 2018 and 2019 will be presented to the Council for approval at a future meeting.

SAFEOFOD ADVISORY BOARD APPOINTMENTS

40. Ministers approved the appointments of Prof. Maeve Henchion and Dr. Sinéad McCarthy as members of the *safefood* Advisory Board.

SAFEOFOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

41. The Council approved the appointments of Prof. Elizabeth Keane (Chair), Prof. Mary Corcoran, Prof. Mary Brennan, Ms Mary Daly, Dr Nazih Eldin, Dr Rhodri Evans, Ms Claire MacEvilly, Prof. Eileen Gibney, Prof. Frank Monahan, Dr Muiris O'Ceidigh, and Dr Martin Rose to the *safefood* Advisory Committee.

POSITION OF CEO

42. Ministers approved the appointment of Mr. Ray Dolan as CEO of the Food Safety Promotion Board (*safefood*).

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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

Joint Secretariat
2 October 2020

www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org