



NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

TWENTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

DUBLIN CASTLE

31 JULY 2020

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-fourth Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was held at Dublin Castle on 31 July 2020.
2. The Irish Government was led by the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, who chaired the meeting. The Northern Ireland Executive was led by the First Minister, the Rt. Hon. Arlene Foster MLA, and the deputy First Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA. A full list of the members of both delegations is attached as an Annex.
3. Ministers welcomed the resumption of meetings of the Council. The meeting provided the new Irish Government and the new Northern Ireland Executive with the opportunity to meet formally for the first time and exchange views on a wide range of issues of mutual interest and concern.

WORK OF THE NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

4. Ministers received a report from the Joint Secretaries on the work of the NSMC since 2016, including work undertaken across the NSMC sectors. They noted that three meetings of the Council, including one Institutional meeting, had taken place since the last Plenary meeting in November 2016.
5. The Council noted that the work of the North South Bodies has continued to make a significant contribution to communities, society and the economy in both jurisdictions, and expressed appreciation to the Boards and staff of these bodies for their work since 2016. The Council also welcomed the mutually beneficial

cooperation that has been taken forward between Ministers and their Departments across the Areas of Cooperation.

6. Ministers noted the ongoing work of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership and the continued engagement of senior officials from both Administrations with regional stakeholders regarding the direction and priorities for the North West region.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

7. The Council was briefed by the Chief Medical Officers, Dr. Ronan Glynn and Dr. Michael McBride, on the current public health situation and on ongoing cooperation in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
8. Ministers extended their condolences to all those who have lost loved ones as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. They also expressed their appreciation to all those who have played a part in the Covid-19 response, in particular the health and social care workers who have shown extraordinary courage and dedication in their work on the front line.
9. The Council noted that senior representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, and their Chief Medical Officers, met at the NSMC Secretariat offices in Armagh on 14 March to review the situation regarding the Covid-19 virus and how best to address the outbreak. At that meeting, Ministers affirmed that everything possible would be done in co-ordination and cooperation between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and with the active involvement of the health administrations in both jurisdictions to tackle the outbreak. Senior representatives of both Administrations have continued to meet regularly to discuss the ongoing Covid-19 response.
10. The Council noted the Memorandum of Understanding on Public Health Cooperation on Covid-19 Response agreed between Departments of Health, North and South, on 7 April. The Council 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.
11. Ministers agreed that an early meeting of the Council in the Health sector should review ongoing cooperation in responding to the pandemic.
12. The Council noted the impact of the pandemic on society and on the economy, North and South, and the measures put in place by both Administrations to support communities and businesses affected by the crisis and to assist economic recovery. Ministers agreed that upcoming meetings of the Council in relevant sectors will consider how North-South approaches could contribute to the promotion of economic and social recovery.

NEW DECADE, NEW APPROACH COMMITMENTS

13. Ministers noted the continued commitment of the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to work through the North South Ministerial Council to help deliver projects that will benefit people across the island, including through investment in infrastructure which will support cooperation and unlock the full potential of the economies of both jurisdictions.
14. The Council welcomed progress made to date in progressing commitments identified in Section E of the Fresh Start Agreement relating to infrastructure to support cooperation, and noted the new and renewed commitments set out in *New Decade, New Approach* and the associated Irish Government commitments.
15. The Council requested that relevant Ministers take forward discussions on these commitments, including where appropriate through the work of relevant NSMC sectors. The Council also noted that senior officials will continue to meet regularly to maintain a strategic overview of the projects and commitments set out in the context of *New Decade, New Approach*, and agreed that an update on the implementation of *New Decade, New Approach* commitments will be brought to the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU

16. The Council had a discussion on the Implications of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, including the Protocol on Ireland /Northern Ireland. The common interest of both jurisdictions to minimise disruption to trade and economic activity on the island was recognised and Ministers looked forward to further engagement on this topic at NSMC Sectoral meetings.
17. Engagement at official level, and at Ministerial level outside the structures of the North South Ministerial Council, will also continue.

BOARDS OF NORTH SOUTH IMPLEMENTATION BODIES AND TOURISM IRELAND

18. The Council approved the appointment of Directors to the Board of Tourism Ireland, and agreed that appointments will be made to fill remaining vacancies on the Boards of North South Implementation Bodies at future meetings of the Council.

FUTURE NSMC MEETINGS

19. The Council approved a schedule of NSMC meetings proposed by the Joint Secretariat, and agreed that at upcoming sectoral meetings Ministers will consider priorities and work programmes in the relevant sectoral areas. The Council agreed that the next NSMC Plenary meeting will be held in December 2020.

**Joint Secretariat
31 July 2020**

**MEETING OF THE NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
DUBLIN CASTLE – 31 JULY 2020**

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Micheál Martin TD Taoiseach	Rt. Hon. Arlene Foster MLA First Minister
Leo Varadkar TD Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Michelle O'Neill MLA deputy First Minister
Eamon Ryan TD Minister for Climate Action, Communications Networks and Transport	Diane Dodds MLA Minister for the Economy
Paschal Donohoe TD Minister for Finance	Nichola Mallon MLA Minister for Infrastructure
Michael McGrath TD Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform	Conor Murphy MLA Minister of Finance
Simon Coveney TD Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence	Carál Ní Chuilín MLA Minister for Communities
Norma Foley TD Minister for Education	Edwin Poots MLA Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Roderic O'Gorman TD Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration	Robin Swann MLA Minister of Health
Helen McEntee TD Minister for Justice	Peter Weir MLA Minister of Education
Heather Humphreys TD Minister for Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands	Declan Kearney MLA Junior Minister, The Executive Office
Darragh O'Brien TD Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Gordon Lyons MLA Junior Minister, The Executive Office
Catherine Martin TD Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht	
Stephen Donnelly TD Minister for Health	
Simon Harris TD Minister for Higher Education, Innovation and Science	
Dara Calleary TD Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine	