

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

14 OCTOBER 2021

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-fourth North South Ministerial Council Health and Food Safety meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh and by videoconference on 14 October 2021. The meeting was attended by Stephen Donnelly TD, Minister for Health, Roderic O’Gorman TD, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health, and Declan Kearney MLA, Junior Minister. Minister Donnelly chaired the meeting.
2. Ministers expressed their appreciation and good wishes to Ms. Bernie McCrory following her retirement from the post of Chief Officer of Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) and acknowledged her significant contribution over many years to cooperation in the health sector.
3. Ministers noted the recent publication of the report on mother and baby institutions and Magdalene Laundries in NI and the actions being progressed by the Irish Government in response to the final report of the Commission of Investigation into mother and baby homes. It was agreed that the concerns and needs of those who spent time in these institutions would be discussed more substantively at a future meeting of the Council.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

4. Ministers received an update from the Irish Government's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Ronan Glynn, and the Executive's Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, on the health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. The Council restated its appreciation to all those who have played a part in the response to the pandemic, in particular the health and social care workers who continue to lead on the front line response.
6. Ministers noted the ongoing valuable cooperation taking place between Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and health administrations in both jurisdictions, to deliver an effective public health response.
7. The NSMC welcomed the continuing collaboration between the two jurisdictions on the further development of the proximity apps and noted the advanced discussions between the two Administrations on a data sharing agreement in relation to passengers arriving into each jurisdiction.
8. Ministers noted that officials from both jurisdictions will continue to consider learnings from the pandemic and exchange views to foster commonality in their approach, where possible, and provide a progress update at a future NSMC Health Meeting.

REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME

9. The NSMC welcomed the progress made to date in implementing the Council's current work programme in the Health Sector and noted that the Departments of Health in both jurisdictions continue to engage on this matter and have identified additional areas which have potential for further development and collaboration between the health authorities in both jurisdictions.
10. Ministers noted that work to ensure the work programme reflects the priorities of each Administration will continue, and that a further draft revised work programme will be presented for consideration at a future NSMC meeting in the Health sector.

HEALTH AND CHILD PROTECTION

HEALTH COOPERATION UPDATES

11. The Council noted the successful enactment of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2021, and the launch of NI's new Substance Use Strategy "Preventing Harm and Empowering Recovery".
12. Ministers noted the continued progress on the development and implementation of strategies to prevent the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse in both jurisdictions as well as the potential for further collaboration on issues connected with alcohol and drug use, such as the sharing of learnings through the North/South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group.

13. The NSMC noted the potential alignment of tobacco legislation to promote public health particularly in young people and children. Ministers noted the update on suicide prevention initiatives in both jurisdictions including the joint working on the Self Harm Registry and the potential for further joint working on suicide prevention.
14. The Council also noted the updates on the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network, including the establishment of regional centres and training programmes, as well as recent updates on the North/South Living Donor Exchange Kidney Transplant Service.

CANCER AND HEALTH RESEARCH COOPERATION

15. The NSMC noted the ongoing success of the Radiotherapy Services at Altnagelvin Hospital and that a review of the Service Level Agreement has been undertaken.
16. Ministers noted the updated position regarding the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium, with the first Implementation Group meeting held on 13 October 2021.
17. The Council welcomed the public consultation on the draft '*Cancer Strategy for Northern Ireland 2021-31*' and the development of a cancer recovery plan 'Building Back; Rebuilding better' which includes the need to adopt innovative ways to deliver services that have been identified during the pandemic and is aligned with the first three years of the cancer strategy.
18. Ministers noted the work of the US-Ireland R&D Partnership in relation to cancer research and the renewal of co-funding arrangements made to NI by the Medical Research Council.
19. The Council noted that the All-Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care (AIHPC) Palliative Care Week took place between 12-18 September 2021 and welcomed the ongoing initiatives to provide support to those requiring their services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
20. The NSMC welcomed the extra €1.76m of funding awarded to the Cross-border Healthcare Intervention Trials in Ireland Network (CHITIN) and noted the uplift in award results in an extension of programme activity to June 2023.

CHILD PROTECTION

21. The Council noted that the updating of the 'Protocol between Northern Ireland and Ireland for Handling Inter-Jurisdictional child cases' is now complete, and that the revised protocol came into effect in August 2021.
22. Ministers noted that a knowledge exchange forum of child protection practitioners working at an operational level in both jurisdictions has been established to initially focus on the sharing of learning from implementing the Signs of Safety methodology, that additional opportunities to extend the remit of the group will be developed and that an update will be provided at a future NSMC meeting.

FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD/SAFEFOOD

SAFEFOOD PROGRESS REPORT

23. Ministers received an update from the Food Safety Promotion Board (*safefood*) on the progress made by the Body since the last sectoral meeting, including campaigns related to weight management, handwashing and food safety. The NSMC noted the high-level achievements of *safefood* during this period.
24. The Council noted that the Body has developed and distributed various resources in educational settings, delivered events including webinars and a podcast series and promoted healthy eating guidelines.
25. Ministers also noted that *safefood* has engaged with customers on social media, and carried out research in relation to food allergens, sustainable food policy, fiscal and pricing policies related to food and non-alcoholic drinks. The NSMC noted that the Body has developed various networks including Community Food Initiatives and the Knowledge Network e-learning platform and is also delivering Community Food Initiatives such as 'CFI at home' projects.

UPDATE ON SAFEFOOD CEO POSITION

26. The NSMC noted the update provided on the recruitment process for the post of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of *safefood*. The Council also noted the extension of the term of office of Mr Raymond Dolan in the post of CEO until such time as the recruitment process has been completed and a new CEO is in a position to take up the appointment.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

27. The Council appointed Damien McCallion, Irene Collins, Ken McKenzie and Elizabeth Keane to the Advisory Board of the Food Safety Promotion Board (*safefood*) for the period 13 December 2021 to 12 December 2026, with Mr. McCallion to serve as Vice-Chairperson. Eddie Rooney was reappointed as a member and to serve as Chairperson of the Advisory Board of the Food Safety Promotion Board (*safefood*) from 13 December 2021 to 12 December 2026.
28. The NSMC appointed Fiona Walsh and Niall Greene to the Board of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (Loughs Agency) for the period 13 December 2021 to 12 December 2024, and also Heather Mackey, Frances Lucy, Jack Keyes, Declan Little and Conor Corr for the period 13 December 2021 to 12 December 2026, with Ms. Mackey to serve as Chairperson.
29. The Council appointed Richard Kennedy to the post of Chairperson of the Board of InterTradelreland for the period 13 December 2021 to 12 December 2026.
30. The Council appointed Maighr ad N  Chonghaile to the Board of the North South Language Body for the period 13 December 2021 to 12 December 2026.
31. The Council appointed Christopher Brooke, Katy Best, Kathryn Thompson, John McGrillen, Laura McCorry and Harry Connolly to serve as Directors to Tourism

Ireland CLG for the period 19 December 2021 to 18 December 2026, with Mr. Brooke to serve as Chairperson.

PEACE PLUS PROGRAMME

32. The Council noted the progress achieved since the Special EU Programmes Sectoral Meeting in October 2020 on the development of the 2021-27 PEACE PLUS programme and that work is continuing to deliver an agreed programme.
33. Ministers also noted that a public consultation for the new programme was launched on 10 March and concluded on 12 May 2021 and that further refinement of the cooperation document has taken place to reflect the stakeholder input received.
34. The NSMC noted that the draft PEACE PLUS programme has been approved by both Administrations.
35. The Council approved the PEACE PLUS programme proposals which have been prepared by the Special EU Programmes Body and noted that, following NSMC approval, the draft PEACE PLUS programme cooperation document will be submitted to the European Commission for approval as soon as possible.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

36. The Council agreed that the next NSMC Health and Food Safety meeting will be held in early 2022.

Joint Secretariat
14 October 2021

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