

The NI Engagement Forum (the Forum) on Covid-19 - Terms of Reference

Background

On 28 March 2020, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced a series of enhanced containment measures designed to restrict the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The package of measures included the establishment of a multi-stakeholder forum to advise the Executive on how best to manage the challenge of Covid-19 as it applies to the NI Economy/Labour Market; and to be the primary conduit for the Executive to consult on new approaches in response to emerging pressures.

The Forum will report progress after each meeting to the Executive through the Minister for the Economy.

Membership

The following have agreed to join the Forum:

Ministers Kearney and Lyons (TEO)

CBI (Sam Davidson), Chamber of Commerce (Ian Henry), FSB (Tina McKenzie), IOD (Gordon Milligan), Manufacturing NI (Stephen Kelly), NI Retail Consortium (Aodhan Connolly).

The Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU represented by Owen Reidy, Michaela Lafferty, Patricia McKeown, Alison Millar, Gerry Murphy, Jackie Pollock.

PHA (Brendan Bonner), HSE (Robert Kidd), SOLACE (Jacqui Dixon)

The Labour Relations Agency (Marie Mallon) will chair the Forum

The Chief Executive (Tom Evans) of the Labour Relations Agency will provide support to the Chair, and liaise with DfE on actions agreed by the Forum

If one of the Forum members is unavailable, a deputy may attend

Officials from DfE (Michael Gould) will provide secretariat support and advice to the Forum

In addition, a DAERA senior official (Brian Dooher) will attend as required to provide expert advice.

Purpose

The core purpose of the Forum is to advise and support the Executive in its commitment to contain the Covid-19 virus as it applies to the NI Economy/Labour Market.

Objectives

- Provide a single voice on actions/measures that need to be taken to protect the safety of key workers and essential businesses across the NI Labour Market;
- Promote the need for all businesses and employees/workers to comply with contemporary PHA guidance within the workplace;
- Provide ongoing advice on the list of key workers/essential/non-essential businesses expressed in the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020;
- Advise on additional decisions/contingency measures that may be required, including further closures or restrictions on types of businesses and more rigorous social distancing;
- Provide ongoing feedback on the effectiveness of the Executive's Covid-19 response plan in relation to the NI Economy and Labour Market;
- Develop an agreed Emergency Code of Practice that will offer practical assistance to essential businesses and their workforce to fully comply with the Health Protection Regulations and PHA/HSE guidance (single code developed by HSE, LRA and PHA);
- Discuss and advise the Executive around the implementation of the Chancellors wage subsidy schemes;
- To advise on additional measures that will offer greater protection to the wider NI Community;
- To engage with a wide range of key experts to ensure that the Forum provides the most effective advice to the Executive.

Operating Principles

This is a unique and very diverse stakeholder group, entrusted by the Executive to be the single voice for employees/ workers and businesses.

It is important that the Forum delivers on what is a hugely important and onerous responsibility. The Forum has established the following operating principles that will guide its work over what is a critical period for all citizens and the wider NI community.

- The safety and the health and wellbeing of our people has primacy;
- All business will be conducted on the basis of mutual trust, shared understanding and an absolute commitment to our core purpose;
- Shared responsibility to achieve decisions/recommendations on a consensus basis;
- An absolute commitment to confidentiality; and
- Public representation on the work of the Forum is the responsibility of the Minister for the Economy.

Pattern of Meetings

Given the urgency of the issues for consideration by the Forum, it is likely that meetings will happen frequently (at least two per week during this difficult time).