

MINISTERIAL DIRECTION – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Department:

Department for the Economy (DfE)

Title:

Covid Restrictions Business Support Scheme (CRBSS) – Extensions from 1) 31st March 2021 to 14th April 2021; and 2) 15th April 2021 – 23rd May 2021.

Description:

The CRBSS scheme was covered by a Ministerial Direction from its launch. Subsequent Ministerial Directions were requested and received to extend the CRBSS for the following two time periods: 1) 31st March 2021 to 14th April 2021; and 2) 15th April 2021 – 23rd May 2021.

Background:

Extension 1; 31.03.21 to 14.04.21

On 18th February 2021, the Executive agreed to extend Covid restrictions as set out in the Health Protection Regulations until 1 April 2021. The extension of Covid restrictions meant that businesses that were at that stage provided support via the CRBSS would remain impacted. The then Economy Minister Diane Dodds subsequently wrote to Executive colleagues outlining VfM concerns around extending the CRBSS and highlighting the need for a further Ministerial Direction should payments continue. The advice reiterated the VFM concerns expressed in the original scheme assessment and cognisant of that advice, the Executive was content that schemes continue based on the original payment structure. The position at that time was that eligible applicants would receive top-up grant payments to cover up to 31 March. As restrictions were to continue beyond that date, it was agreed to provide further top-up grants via a CRBSS extension to cover any new period of restrictions ahead of the 15 April 2021 review point.

Extension 2; 15th April 2021 – 23rd May 2021

On 15 April 2021, the Executive extended some of the Health Protection Regulations until 23 May 2021. This extension had implications for the CRBSS which provided support to businesses forced to close or cease trading by the Health Protection Regulations, but which were not eligible for the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme (LRSS). The announcement made on 15 April 2021, was assessed to affect some businesses that were at that time being supported under CRBSS under Parts A and B. A phased extension to the scheme was requested to provide support to those

businesses remaining affected, for example those in close contact services who were unable to resume work until 23 April and non-essential retail from 30 April.

Rationale:

Extensions 1 and 2

The CRBSS was operating under a Ministerial Direction. Given significant value for money concerns that had previously been raised, a new Ministerial Direction was requested to extend the grant payments to cover the new period of restrictions. The DfE Accounting Officer was unable to give the necessary assurances that extending grant payments to cover the new periods of restrictions represented value for money as required by the MPMNI for either of the extension periods.