

NatWest may wind down Ulster Bank in Republic

JOE BRENNAN

Ulster Bank's UK parent is actively considering winding down the lender in the Republic, as the challenge of turning around a business struggling with high costs and low profitability has become even greater as a result of the coronavirus crisis, according to sources.

This puts more than 2,500 jobs and the future of its 88 branches around the State at risk.

Winding down the business would take an estimated six

years and involve a number of loan portfolio sales, which would attract both rival banks and non-bank lenders, sources said. Ulster Bank's customers would also be required to make alternative arrangements for their day-to-day banking needs.

NatWest, formerly Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), is also weighing the merits of Ulster Bank Ireland merging with another lender, though this is said to be a less likely outcome.

While 75 per cent Government-owned Permanent TSB would be the most likely candi-

date for a tie-up, it is understood that no approaches have been made by NatWest. An exit of Ulster Bank would also increase the dominance of Bank of Ireland and AIB in the market and would be a major blow to competition here, given that are just five main lenders in the market.

The strategic review, which is being tightly guarded and run out of the UK, is at an advanced stage and comes as NatWest's chief executive, Alison Rose, approaches the first anniversary in November of her time in

charge of the UK banking giant. Ms Rose set about restructuring the group's main problem child, its NatWest Markets investment banking division, last February with plans to halve the size of that business. She also ditched the RBS name this year.

'Shocked and angry'

FSU, the main union representing financial staff, yesterday expressed shock at news of the review.

"If this story is substantiated, we are shocked and angry at

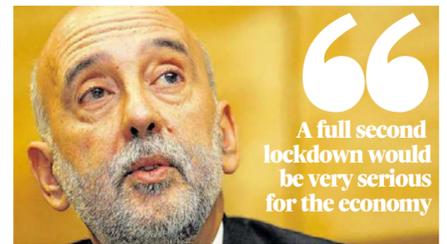
how the bank is treating staff. We have been engaged in good faith in a restructure process over the last number of weeks to secure jobs and minimise redundancies and the bank reassured us of the commitment from NatWest to Ulster Bank," said FSU general secretary John O'Connell.

"I immediately call on both Jane Howard [Ulster Bank chief executive] and Alison Rose to refute this story and assure the thousands of staff here in Ireland of their jobs," he added.

Ulster Bank received a bailout from RBS of £15.3 billion (£16.4 million) after the 2008 crash, about a third of the money UK taxpayers pumped into the entire group.

Having spent more than 10 years selling off problem loans, cutting jobs and branches, the Dublin-based unit's assets had shrunk to €30.6 billion last year – less than half what they were at the peak.

Has NatWest finally run out of patience with Ulster Bank? Business



A full second lockdown would be very serious for the economy

Central Bank governor Gabriel Makhoul

BUSINESS THIS WEEK INTERVIEW

Dublin faces new restrictions from midnight to counter spike in virus

Cabinet advised restaurants and pubs should not serve food indoors

Travel to and from capital will only be permitted for work or education

PAT LEAHY and CARL O'BRIEN

The Government will today impose new restrictions on social and economic life in Dublin in response to the rise in Covid-19 cases in the capital in recent weeks.

The Cabinet is expected to approve a proposal to move Dublin to Level 3 of the Covid restrictions, with Ministers due to sign regulations this evening to impose the restrictions across a range of activities from midnight.

Under additional restrictions for dining, restaurants and pubs which serve food will only be permitted to open if they have outdoor facilities, or for takeaway services.

The Government's public health experts made the recommendations last night amid growing alarm at the rise in cases in the last seven to 10 days.

Restaurants Association of Ireland chief executive Adrian Cummins said it was "shocked" indoor dining was to close in Dublin for the next few weeks.

Regulated environments "Currently, controlled and regulated environments like restaurants are not the problem – households are," he tweeted.

In other measures, travel into and from Dublin will only be permitted for work or education, and people will be told to work from home unless absolutely necessary. The



number of guests allowed at weddings will be cut from 50 to 25, although weddings organised for this weekend will be allowed to continue as planned, with the new restriction only coming into place on Monday.

Government sources also indicated that third-level colleges in Dublin may be required to move as much tuition as possible online.

At present, most third-level institutions are preparing for a combination of online and in-person tuition. However, sources indicated that only essential campus-based activities may now take place in Dublin.

The Cabinet committee on Covid-19 will meet this morning to consider the recommendations from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET), but sources say that the

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Small steps can work just as well as sledgehammer Paul Cullen

Culture Night organisers prepare for likely new Dublin Covid-19 restrictions

Declaring lockdown was easy part of Covid battle Opinion, page 10

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recommendations are certain to be adopted. They will then be approved by the Cabinet, with an announcement likely to be made by Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Tánaiste Leo

Varadkar later in the day.

NPHET held a lengthy meeting yesterday before forwarding its recommendations to the Government. They were then considered by another committee of senior officials chaired by the State's top civil servant, Martin Fraser, and also attended by the heads of the departments of health and justice, as well as HSE chief executive Paul Reid and acting chief medical officer Dr Ronan Glynn.

New rules

The new rules will mark a tightening of the restrictions in Dublin but the rest of the country will remain at Level 2.

In Dublin, social and family gatherings outside the home are likely to be prohibited, while visitors to the home should be restricted to people

from one other household. Sports matches will also be discontinued, though there is an exemption for elite sport, which includes club championship games.

No organised indoor events such as conferences and events in arts venues will be allowed to take place.

Last night, health officials reported that one more person had died of Covid-19 and a further 240 cases had been reported.

Nearly half of the cases (119) were in Dublin, while there was also a growing age profile among those catching the virus.

The latest figures mean the death toll in the State has risen to 1,789. Confirmed cases have now breached the 32,000 mark, climbing to 32,023.

Sun and social distance: Members of the public enjoying the good weather in Merrion Square, Dublin 2, yesterday. Level 3 restrictions are expected to be introduced in the capital after a Cabinet meeting today. PHOTOGRAPH: GARETH CHANEY/COLLINS

Irish climate set to change dramatically by 2050

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN

Environment and Science Editor

Ireland's climate is likely to change dramatically by 2050, with the eastern region most affected by higher temperatures, according to the most detailed projections ever generated for the country.

The analysis, produced by a supercomputer, indicates temperatures in Ireland are set to increase by up to 1.6 degrees

due to climate change compared with the 1981-2000 period.

The key Paris Agreement target is to keep the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels this century, and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees to avoid runaway climate change.

There will be "enhanced warming in the east" and more extreme weather events across

the whole of the country by 2050, the Irish Centre for High-End Computing predicts.

It says the growing season will be extended by 45 days a year, which has immense implications for agriculture, both from a positive and negative perspective. It will enable diversification in crop production but will also increase the threat of pests, while wetter winters will hamper farming activity, according to the team

who conducted the advanced computer modelling exercise.

The report indicates "substantial decreases of approximately 50 per cent are projected in the number of frost and ice days", and a similar reduction in snowfall.

The projections provide unprecedented detail on regional climate impacts, with the south expected to become most vulnerable to heatwaves. All regions will experience more ex-

treme rain driven by a warming world – and yet more dry spells.

The analysis, which factored in global data, was conducted using the national supercomputer at Waterford IT known as Kay. The Irish Centre for High-End Computing is based at NUI Galway and at Grand Canal Quay in Dublin.

Unprecedented detail in climate predictions for Ireland in 2050: page 4

Weather

Dry and mostly sunny after mist patches clear. Highest temperatures of 16-21 degrees in moderate breezes.

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Social Welfare: Aer Lingus failed to provide documentation so employees could claim welfare entitlements, the Dáil heard: page 3

World News



Brexit: Former Conservative leader Michael Howard has said he will not be able to vote for the UK Internal Market Bill in the House of Lords: page 7

Business + This Week

Insurance: An industry watchdog has said it has "reasonable grounds" to suspect that a number of Irish motor insurers broke anti-trust laws.

TikTok: The Chinese-headquartered social media company is considering a major expansion of its Irish-based operations.

Sports Friday

Soccer: A goal in each half from Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Hakan Calhanoglu saw AC Milan ease to a 2-0 win over Shamrock Rovers: page 12

Cycling: Sam Bennett has 52 points to spare on his green-jersey rival Peter Sagan with only three stages to go in the Tour de France: page 14



US Open McIlroy off to a flyer at Winged Foot SPORTS FRIDAY



Mark Paul Why not all SMEs are worth saving BUSINESS THIS WEEK



Diarmaid Ferriter

Those with power in Downing Street – none more so than Dominic Cummings – have no regard for Northern Ireland or the DUP Opinion, page 12



Hilary Fannin

I need some new underwear. Or maybe, I thought, shuffling through the theatre of underwire and lace, I actually need some armour, some backbone, some grit. Page 11



Denis Staunton

Both Gove and Boris Johnson betrayed Cameron by backing Brexit in the 2016 referendum but while Johnson was soon forgiven, Gove never was London Letter, page 9



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