

# Briefing for COVID Strategy Committee

21/09/2020, 14:00

## Summary:

- There is a paper proposing measures for agreement today and announcement tomorrow. Overall, **the package has shifted and is now heavily weighted towards economic restrictions**, rather than social restrictions, despite the evidence from the JBC on the latter driving transmissions. Of the economic restrictions, the most worrying from our perspective are a public trailing of a “circuit breaker” short lockdown if the data doesn’t improve and additional measures on hospitality (which stop short of full closure).
- More generally, **we are reaching the limits of what we can do economically**, with further measures likely to be catastrophic. We need a strategy that works over the winter period, rather than tinkering with restrictions week to week.
- We should **encourage the Committee to return to the evidence**. The latest data and modelling from SAGE is of course concerning, but it’s worth remembering we don’t yet know the impact of the rule of six, tougher powers, nor the measures in North and Midlands.
- What we do know from JBC is **that transmission is being driven in social settings, exacerbated by non-compliance. So we should target interventions in this area** and you may wish to push our suggestions to Cabinet Office such as mandating face coverings indoors except when eating and drinking, banning inter-household contact within the home, limits on places of worship and segmentation/shielding (the HMT plan on a page is attached for information).

- We **suggest you push back strongly on the circuit breaker proposal**. The economic impacts would be severe, making firm failures and redundancies far likelier. There is no evidence that a circuit-breaker of two–three weeks will only be in force for that long, meaning we could end up lifting restrictions when the health data (hospitalisations and particularly deaths) could still be going in the wrong direction because of lag–time.
- However, **some additional restrictions with some economic impact are probably inevitable at this stage. On hospitality, we should push strongly for the opening time restrictions to be 11pm–5am** rather than 10pm–5pm (although 10pm closures are currently in place in Bolton, parts of the North East, Merseyside and Lancashire) to be consistent with international precedent – ranging between 11pm (Marseille, Iceland) and 1am (Spain, Netherlands) – and to facilitate multiple evening covers at restaurants. There is no reason for applying a 10pm cut–off beyond the UK local precedent, and this change will make a significant difference to the sector. **On mass events, we should continue with pilots** to help these sectors stand on their own feet and to align with international practice.

### **Speaking Points**

- We should see these restrictions in the context of what we have already announced – tightening the requirement on people to self–isolate when they test positive or are told to do so by Track & Trace; tightening social restrictions; and imposing both social and economic restrictions across high–prevalence areas of the country. This is in line with what other European countries are doing in response to increases in incidence of this type.
- The measures in this package – including overnight restrictions and table–service only in the hospitality sector, along with changing our guidance from working from home – will have significant economic

## **Mass Events**

- The paper proposes a cancellation of the planned return of business events and crowds in stadia and a pause on pilots, with redistribution from within the sector or financial support from the government provided instead.
- We need to encourage these sectors to become financially self-sufficient. We should be clear that this is a choice between safely opening and laying off staff/closing.
- Our focus should be continuing the pilots, with enhanced mitigations or caps on capacity as necessary, to ensure that these events can reopen once it is safe to do so.
- Other countries have reopened these sectors with mitigations in place, and we should seek to learn from their experiences. For example, in Germany lower league football matches are open for up to 5,000 fans with mitigations, similarly in France sports stadiums and racing tracks have reopened for up to 5,000 spectators as well and business events are going ahead at 50% capacity. In Denmark, Italy and New Zealand business events are also going forward with capacity constraints of 500, 200 and 100 delegates respectively.
- We should make distinctions within these sectors based on which venues are higher risk and lower risk, rather than moving for sector wide delays. Even if mass events do not go forward on 1 October, smaller outdoor events which are lower risk should go ahead.

## **Joint Bio-Security Centre – Local/ Regional Interventions**

- **‘Tiering’ NPIs:**
  - o We should not be considering making hospitality takeaway only. This is the same as we did in March, which saw GVA in the sector fall by 80–90% and c. 80% of jobs furloughed. This has a real risk of long term scarring. We have to look at more targeted measures.