

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE - CABINET

*Cabinet will wish to note that these minutes, except those items in italics, will be published in week commencing 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021*

The Welsh Government  
Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet  
Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2020  
(Teams)

Present: Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS (Chair)  
Rebecca Evans MS  
Vaughan Gething MS  
Lesley Griffiths MS  
Julie James MS  
Eluned Morgan MS  
Ken Skates MS  
Kirsty Williams MS  
Jeremy Miles MS

Hannah Blythyn MS  
Jane Hutt MS  
Julie Morgan MS  
Dafydd Elis Thomas MS  
Lee Waters MS

Officials: Shan Morgan, Permanent Secretary  
Carys Evans, Principal Private Secretary First Minister  
Will Whiteley, Deputy Director, Cabinet Division  
Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications  
Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser  
Madeleine Brindley, Special Adviser  
Alex Bevan, Special Adviser  
Ian Butler, Special Adviser  
Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser  
Name Redacted Special Adviser  
Paul Griffiths, Special Adviser  
Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser  
Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser  
Gareth Williams, Special Adviser  
Name Redacted Special Adviser  
Tom Woodward, Special Adviser  
Name Redacted Specialist Policy Adviser  
NR Specialist Adviser for Education Reform  
Tracey Burke, Director General, Education and Public Services  
Andrew Goodall, Director General, Health  
Andrew Slade, Director General ESNR  
Reg Kilpatrick, Director General COVID-19 Crisis Coordination  
Chris Jones, Deputy CMO  
Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Adviser for Health  
Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel  
Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services

Tom Smithson, Deputy Director Restart  
Neil Buffin, Senior Lawyer  
Terry Kowal, Senior Legislative Counsel  
Christopher Williams, Consultant Epidemiologist, Public Health Wales  
Catherine Moore, Consultant Clinical Scientist, Public Health Wales

**Item 1: COVID-19 – response to**

- 1.1 The First Minister advised Ministers that earlier that day he had met with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the First Ministers of Scotland and Northern Ireland, along with the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser for England, to discuss the very latest information about a new strain of coronavirus. As a result of this development with the virus, the Prime Minister would be announcing, later that afternoon, significant new measures to control COVID-19 in London, Kent, Essex and the East of England, and changes to arrangements over the Christmas period for the rest of England. Ministers would need to consider the impact on Wales.
- 1.2 Ministers were reminded that any restrictions relating to COVID-19 would be for the purpose of preventing, protecting against, controlling or providing a public health response to the incidence, spread of infection or contamination. There must be a threat to public health and the restrictions had to be proportionate in what they were intending to achieve.
- 1.3 The First Minister invited the Deputy CMO to provide the latest advice in respect of the new strain of the virus and the impact this would have on the NHS.
- 1.4 While the case rate per 100,000 population for the UK was around 250 per 100k, London was at 450 cases, which had doubled in one week. Other areas in the Thames Estuary were over 900 cases per 100,000. Cases were rising fastest in younger age groups, 10-14 and 15-19, and this was beginning to manifest in growing rates for the over 60s.
- 1.5 This rapid growth was driven by a new mutation of the virus. Public Health Wales confirmed early, but robust evidence, suggested the new strain was substantially more transmissible. 60% of new cases in South East England were of the new variant. It was thought that the disease pathways and outcomes remained in line with existing strains of COVID-19 and there was no evidence to suggest the mutation would respond differently to the vaccines.
- 1.6 In Wales there was high and increasing incidence in almost all areas, particularly in the south. There were, potentially, 600 cases which may add 0.4 to the R value. Of the current sample of cases available, the highest proportion of cases testing positive for the new mutation was in North Wales, suggesting a reservoir of cases. This new mutation was possibly 70 per cent more transmissible. It was reported that hospital admissions were running ahead of the Reasonable Worst Case Scenario and there was significant pressure on the social care sector.

- 1.7 There were calls on the Government for early and robust measures from a range of public sector partners.
- 1.8 *The Chief Executive of NHS Wales reported there were now more than 2200 COVID-19 patients in beds, of which more than 1000 were confirmed. This was running ahead of the current Reasonable Worst Case Scenario. The NHS was concerned about resilience with pressure expected to increase into the new year. The Welsh Ambulance Service was already experiencing issues. Critical care capacity was currently at 200, of which 100 were COVID-19 patients, with a current trend of 25% weekly growth.*
- 1.9 The First Minister informed Cabinet that it was likely that the UK Government would move Tier 3 areas in the east and south east of England to an enhanced Tier 4, in effect a full lockdown. This would be accompanied by strong stay at home messages, which would likely be supported by regulation and the Christmas relaxations would be removed completely. The rest of England would remain in their existing Tiers but with an enhanced stay local message, with a possibility of a reduction in the Christmas household relaxations to Christmas Day only.
- 1.10 Ministers were advised that the rates per 100,000 in some areas of Wales were higher than in some of the English Tier 3 areas, which were being moved to enhanced Tier 4.
- 1.11 Given that the mutated virus was present in all parts of Wales, there were concerns about the current travel arrangements, which would enable large numbers of people to continue to move around the UK at Christmas. In addition, household mixing would drive spread of the virus and increase incidence in January.
- 1.12 Ministers considered the options available within the paper and, *having weighed the socio-economic harms of acting against the direct public health harms and harms associated with increased pressure on the NHS of not*, agreed that whilst there was a need to avoid further disruption to businesses and plans for Christmas, the Government's overriding duty was to protect lives in Wales.
- 1.13 Cabinet agreed to bring forward the Alert Level 4 restrictions for the whole of Wales, in line with the action being taken in London and the South East of England. *It was acknowledged that the new variant of the virus was present in all parts of Wales and taking action on an all-Wales basis would ensure all areas were protected.* These new restrictions would come into effect from midnight that night instead of from 28<sup>th</sup> December. This would require non-essential retail, close contact services, gyms and leisure centres, hospitality and accommodation to close at the end of trading. In addition, stay-at-home restrictions would also come into effect from midnight.
- 1.14 Those in holiday accommodation in Wales should make arrangements to leave and return home at the earliest opportunity.

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- 1.15 The Government could not expose people to the risk of this new, more virulent strain of coronavirus, so there would be a need to change the current rules for Christmas. The relaxation, which would allow two households to come together to form a Christmas bubble, would now only apply on Christmas Day. However, throughout the Alert Level 4 period, a single person household would be able to join with one other household.
- 1.16 In terms of financial support for the businesses affected by these changes, there was a further £110m, which had been announced the previous day. This was in addition to the £160m Restrictions Business Fund and £180m targeted hospitality fund. It would be important to ensure that this support was available as quickly as possible to those businesses that needed it.
- 1.17 The Welsh Government would also pass on any further funding that became available to Wales, as a result of decisions made by the UK Government to support businesses in London and the South East during the Tier 4 lockdown period.
- 1.18 Cabinet noted the First Minister would make an announcement about these changes later that afternoon, *in the meantime officials would need to take into account any comments made by Ministers.*

***Officials to take into account comments made by Ministers***

**Section 35**