

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE - CABINET

Cabinet will wish to note that these minutes, except those items in italics, will be published in week commencing 11th January 2021

**The Welsh Government
Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet
Friday 27th November 2020
(Caerdydd 1 & 2 / Teams)**

Present: Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS (Chair)

Via video link: Rebecca Evans MS
Vaughan Gething MS
Lesley Griffiths 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

Apologies: Julie James MS

Officials: Shan Morgan, Permanent Secretary (via video link)
Des Clifford, Director General Office of the First Minister
Carys Evans, Principal Private Secretary First Minister (via video link)
Will Whiteley, Deputy Director, Cabinet Division
Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications (via video link)
Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser (via video link)
Madeleine Brindley, Special Adviser (via video link)
Alex Bevan, Special Adviser (via video link)
Ian Butler, Special Adviser (via video link)
Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser (via video link)
Sarah Faye, Special Adviser (via video link)
Paul Griffiths, Special Adviser (via video link)
Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser (via video link)
Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser (via video link)
Gareth Williams, Special Adviser (via video link)
Mitch Theaker, Special Adviser (via video link)
Tom Woodward, Special Adviser (via video link)
NR Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
NR, Specialist Policy Adviser (via video link)
NR Specialist Adviser for Education Reform (via video link)
Tracey Burke, Director General, Education and Public Services (via video link)
Andrew Goodall, Director General, Health (via video link)
Andrew Slade, Director General ESNR (via video link)
Reg Kilpatrick, Director General COVID-19 Crisis Coordination (via video link)

Frank Atherton, CMO (via video link)
Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Adviser for Health (via video link)
Simon Brindle, Director Restart Coordination (via video link)
Andrew Jeffreys, Director Treasury (via video link)
Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel (via video link)
Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services (via video link)
Emma Watkins, Deputy Director Economic Policy (via video link)
Tom Smithson, Deputy Director Restart (via video link)
Liz Lalley, Deputy Director Recovery (via video link)
Terry Kowal, Senior Legislative Counsel (via video link)
Neil Buffin, Senior Lawyer (via video link)

Item 1: COVID-19 – Managing COVID-19 through December

- 1.1 The First Minister advised Ministers that the purpose of the meeting was for Cabinet to continue consideration of whether further restrictions should be implemented in the near future to help guarantee that families could meet for up to five days over the Christmas period.
- 1.2 Any restrictions 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 epidemiological evidence showed a rise in the number of infections, which if left unchecked, would overwhelm an already stretched NHS. This was especially evident in the under 25 age group, which would lead to greater spread and higher incidence in older age groups.
- 1.4 Ministers were reminded that the scientific modelling revealed that the growth of the virus could be controlled using non-pharmaceutical interventions, and early interventions were key. The measures proposed in the paper would allow Wales to enter the festive period with a lower virus prevalence and by doing so would reduce the health risks associated with intergenerational mixing.
- 1.5 The approach suggested had the potential to mitigate some of the socio-economic harms associated with longer periods of interventions.
- 1.6 The First Minister referred to both the public health and NHS capacity context, and Cabinet agreed that action was needed in response to the advice from the Chief Medical Officer, Chief Executive of the NHS and the Chief Scientific Officer.
- 1.7 Alongside the health concerns, Cabinet recognised that significant social and economic harms were being imposed by the pandemic. The international evidence suggested that the highest levels of socio-economic harm occurred where the

disease was most prevalent. If implemented appropriately, restrictions on social and economic activity to control the pandemic could have socio-economic benefits, relative to not implementing such restrictions. Nevertheless, many businesses, particularly the hospitality, tourism and leisure sector, were being hard hit by restrictions on social gatherings.

- 1.8 Whilst assessing the socio-economic harms of interventions was not an exact science, it was inevitable that further restrictions on hospitality, tourism and leisure, even with a substantial support package, would endanger businesses who had already experienced a very difficult year. This could lead to a significant loss of income for thousands of people on already low incomes, and potentially thousands more people losing their jobs.
- 1.9 Cabinet considered the measures being taken within the rest of the United Kingdom and noted that, on 2 December, England would emerge from lockdown and enter into a new, stricter tier system. Eleven areas in west and central Scotland were now in the highest level of the country's five tier system of restrictions, which would be in place until 18:00 on 11 December, at which point they would be reviewed. The Northern Ireland Executive had already agreed to impose two weeks of a hard lockdown from 27 November until 11 December.
- 1.10 Cabinet agreed that, based on the evidence summarised in the paper and the range of evidence previously considered, that measures should be implemented in December to control the growth in incidence of the virus.

Item 2: Interventions to reduce the spread of COVID-19

- 2.1 Cabinet considered the range of interventions that could be deployed to curb the spread of the virus and ensure that households could mix as safely as possible at Christmas.
- 2.2 SAGE had assessed the various programmes on non-pharmaceutical interventions implemented across the four nations. This analysis suggested that the range of measures comprising Level 3 in Scotland were effective at preventing growth of coronavirus and that Tier 3 (very high alert level) in England also had a clear and measurable effect. It was noted that the implementation of Level 3 in Scotland had led to some areas subsequently entering Level 4 and Tier 3 in England had recently been strengthened in response to an evaluation of its impact.
- 2.3 A detailed description of the choices available for Wales was set out at Annex B to the paper, which drew on the lessons from other parts of the UK and from the evidence presented by SAGE.
- 2.4 The most significant of the interventions in economic terms would be further restrictions to the hospitality industry. In terms of which approach could be adopted in Wales, there was no particular public health argument in favour of either the

Scottish or English model. Nonetheless, tighter restrictions on hospitality, entertainment and tourism businesses, particularly over a protracted period, would have significant negative economic impacts, which would fall most heavily on some of the most disadvantaged in our communities.

- 2.5 Cabinet agreed that, on balance, the most appropriate approach would be to draw on the Scottish Level 3 model, to create a bespoke solution for Wales to address its specific circumstances.
- 2.6 It was agreed that pubs, bars, restaurants and cafes would be treated the same. However, the exact detail of the restrictions, such as limits on opening hours and whether the sale of alcohol should be permitted, would need to be determined at a further meeting of the Cabinet to allow more work to be done on the impact of such measures.
- 2.7 In addition, entertainment venues such as cinemas, bingo halls, bowling alleys, indoor play centres and areas, casinos, skating rinks, amusement arcades and adult gaming centres, theatres and concert halls should all be closed. Nightclubs and sexual entertainment venues would remain closed.
- 2.8 In terms of visitor attractions, Cabinet agreed that all indoor areas should be closed on the basis they were associated with people gathering, but outdoor areas should remain open.
- 2.9 All non-essential retail would remain open along with all close-contact retail such as hairdressers. Furthermore, gyms, swimming pools, leisure centres and spas, would remain open, given their direct link with mental health benefits, but further discussion would take place over exercise classes and whether they would be allowed indoors.
- 2.10 In terms of holiday accommodation, it was agreed that the sector should remain open for people within Wales and only to a single household, until the industry could guarantee that sufficient checks were in place to verify that those staying in the same place were part of the same bubble. People were already barred from staying in accommodation with people outside of their own household, which lowered the risk. In addition, proposed restrictions on hospitality and entertainment would further minimise the risk, given opportunities to mix with others would be more limited.
- 2.11 In relation to weddings and funerals, ceremonies would continue to be allowed under social distancing rules and would be limited based on risk assessment and the premises. For receptions and wakes the current rules would be retained, which allowed for up to 15 people to gather indoors for a reception meal or wake.
- 2.12 Finally, Cabinet agreed that childcare, schools, HE and FE institutions should all remain open to protect the futures of younger generations.

- 2.13 Cabinet then turned to the question of whether these restrictions should be implemented on a national basis or an alternative approach, such as on a local or regional basis.
- 2.14 It was noted that the relaxation of restrictions over the festive period across the UK was a four-nation response to the virus. The measure would apply nationally across Wales regardless of the incidence of the virus in any particular area. In line with the CMO's advice, it was reasonable that all interventions should be implemented on that basis as well, in order to bring incidence in all areas to the lowest possible level before conditions were relaxed for Christmas.
- 2.15 It was noted that Local Health Protection Areas had been used previously to respond to localised outbreaks. Under that regime, measures focused on settings, particular groups of people or community outbreaks but did so almost exclusively at local authority level.
- 2.16 Cabinet noted that there was strong evidence that the virus was seeded in communities across Wales, reflected in the high levels of incidence, which were increasing rapidly in some key age groups, and events in Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire in the last fortnight had demonstrated that a small group of individuals could drive growth of the virus very quickly. Given that incidence was a lagging indicator, low figures did not necessarily mean an absence of the virus. In addition, it was suggested that interventions should be considered to have a precautionary effect.
- 2.17 However, it was important to ensure that for areas of lower prevalence, the economic consequences of a national approach had been fully considered. In addition, border areas were a significant consideration, particularly in North Wales, where prevalence of the virus was lower in some regions, at present, than in the south. While there were good arguments for taking a regional approach, there were also strong arguments that maintaining a single national vision would deliver greater benefits in terms of simplicity and consistency of the regulations, which ultimately could be expected to lead to increased compliance.
- 2.18 Having considered the arguments, Ministers agreed that, on balance, restrictions should be applied on a national, all-Wales basis.
- 2.19 The First Minister advised Cabinet that it was his intention to give a broad signal to the media at his press conference that day on the principles agreed by Cabinet that morning. However, a number of areas would need further discussion over the course of the weekend. Cabinet would meet again on Sunday prior to the First Minister announcing the detail of the restrictions and the support package for business the following Monday.