

**The Welsh Government
Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet
15th October 2020
(via 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
Des Clifford, Director General Office of the First Minister
Will Whiteley, Head of 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
Sarah Faye, Special Adviser
Paul Griffiths, Special Adviser
Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser
Gareth Williams, Special Adviser
Mitch Theaker, Special Adviser
Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
Christopher W Morgan, Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
NR Cabinet Secretariat
Jonathan Scourfield, 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
Frank Atherton, CMO
Fliss Bennee, Co-Chair of TAC Cell.
Tom Smithson, Restart Coordination

Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services

Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel

Neil Buffin, Senior Lawyer

NR

CMO's office

Liz Lalley, Deputy Director Recovery and Restart.

Item 1: COVID-19 Further Restrictions

- 1.1 The First Minister informed Ministers that he had called the meeting to seek the agreement of Cabinet to apply a circuit breaker to the whole of Wales to reduce the significant increase in the transmission of the virus.
- 1.2 The Regulations in place were 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 Ministers were being asked to take a decision in principle at this stage to allow further work to take place to firm up proposals. Cabinet would need to meet early the following week to take a decision on substantive recommendations.
- 1.4 Advice from the Chief Medical Officer, the Chief Scientific Officer and the TAC all reflected that of the UK Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, to COBR, that the UK Government's proposals for a three tier system would not stop the rapid spread of the virus and a Circuit Breaker system was the preferred option.
- 1.5 Scientific advice was that a minimum of a two week lockdown was required, but three weeks was preferable. However, there was a need to consider that the longer the restrictions remained in place, the greater the economic, financial and social impact on the well-being of individuals.
- 1.6 New modelling from Swansea University suggested that a two week lockdown, similar to that of earlier in the year, had the potential to reduce the 'R' rate from around 1.4 to 0.8. This would be dependent upon the control measures remaining in place after the restrictions had been lifted.
- 1.7 Hospitals were reporting a significant increase in cases, with 90 people being admitted within the past 24 hours. The number of beds occupied by individuals with COVID-19 related symptoms now stood at 790, up from 500 the previous week. The 150 ICU beds were all occupied, 120 of which were by people recovering from routine appointments. It would be difficult to maintain this balance with the expected increase in COVID-19 cases.

- 1.8 Action already taken in Wales had slowed the rate increase when compared to other areas in the UK. For example, towards the end of September Bolton and Torfaen had similar infection rates, however Bolton was now reporting around 400 cases per 100k people, whereas the Torfaen figure was between 50 and 60.
- 1.9 There would need to be a discussion on the extent of the restrictions, but the preference was for a stay at home message for the two weeks to have the desired effect on the transmission rate. If the messaging was stay local, then the restrictions would have to be applied for longer to bring about the necessary reduction in transmission. It was recognised that either approach could impact the Senedd and Plenary sessions.
- 1.10 The Government's main priority would be to keep schools and childcare settings open, where possible, with the aim of supporting key workers. *The first week of the lockdown would be in half term. For the second week, it was proposed that primary schools would remain open.*
- 1.11 *In terms of secondary schools, there would be classroom based learning but delivered on-line. Some thought would need to be given to supporting those pupils that had just moved up from primary. There was also the issue of examinations scheduled for early November. Some thought could be given to postponing the re-sits, but there was the Oxbridge and Bio-Medical Admissions Test, which the Welsh Government had no control over.*
- 1.12 *There would still be face to face and blended learning at Universities to avoid any mass movement of people, which would increase the risk of students spreading the virus.*
- 1.13 *In terms of outdoor settings, there would be further discussions on whether playground and civic amenities should remain open. There would also be a need to consider the rules about people meeting in private gardens and the limits on the number of people meeting in public places outdoors, such as parks.*
- 1.14 *Ministers recognised that the UK Government's new job support scheme would not start until 1st November, so it was important to ensure that a financial package was in place to support employers and employees for the first week of the Circuit Breaker.*
- 1.15 *Proposals would be presented to the Star Chamber and, once firmed up, funding would be released from the COVID-19 reserve. The necessary cover had been agreed with the UK Treasury. However, there was an added complication of establishing a mechanism to deliver the financial support to all those effected.*
- 1.16 *Businesses would need sufficient time to prepare and the messaging should be clear on what type of establishment would be expected to close. It was recognised that this would have a significant impact on the hospitality sector.*

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE - CABINET

Cabinet will wish to note that these minutes, except those items in italics, will be published in week commencing 23rd November 2020

- 1.17 *It would be important to firm up the measures, as soon as possible, on how the lockdown would be lifted, which would help people prepare and manage expectations. It was clear that it would not be a return to a more relaxed situation as experienced in August.*
- 1.18 *Work was ongoing with Local Authorities and other delivery partners to ensure that they were ready to support the Circuit Breaker.*
- 1.19 *Communications would need to set out clearly why the Welsh Government was taking this action now, in a planned and pre-emptive way, while other parts of the UK were pursuing other control mechanisms. There would be a need to highlight that the more stringent the lockdown, the quicker the virus could be brought back under control. Furthermore, it would be necessary to set out why the local lockdowns, despite good progress, had not been enough to contain its spread.*
- 1.20 *In terms of certainty about whether the Circuit Breaker would bring about the required result, Cabinet was provided with the modelling from Swansea University, which suggested that with necessary action there would be a rapid improvement in a short period of time.*
- 1.21 *Cabinet agreed in principle to introducing a Circuit Breaker from Friday 23rd October to cover three weekends, subject to the necessary work being completed by officials. Ministers would meet again on Monday to consider these recommendations in detail and take a substantive decision.*

Officials to take into account comments made by Ministers

Sections 29, 35 & 36