

**The Welsh Government  
Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet  
Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> 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  
Carys Evans, Principal Private Secretary 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  
NR Special Adviser  
Gareth Williams, Special Adviser  
NR 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  
Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Adviser for Health

Simon Brindle, Director Restart Coordination

Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services

NR First Legislative Counsel

NR Senior Lawyer

NR CMO's office

Jo Trott, COVID-19 response.

## Item 1: COVID-19 Fire-Break

- 1.1 The First Minister advised Ministers that, following the decision by Cabinet on Thursday to agree in principle to apply a fire-break to the whole of Wales, there was now a need to take a substantive decision on the proposals. There were a number of important aspects to consider and it was likely that Cabinet would need to reconvene the following morning.
- 1.2 Ministers were reminded that any restrictions put in place 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 A fire-break was a swift and short-term period of simple, strict restrictions, if applied across the whole of the country would in due course significantly reduce the prevalence of the virus in Wales.
- 1.4 Wales was now in material breach of several of the indicators that, once breached, would require national restrictions and action. There was high confidence that the others would be breached within the next two to three weeks, resulting in significant harm unless action was taken. The Welsh Government aim of protecting both lives and livelihoods required a balancing of harms and action was now required to maintain that balance.
- 1.5 TAC conclusions were clear that, without intervention, the continued increase of cases of COVID-19 in Wales, in hospitals and in ICUs, would be too high for the NHS to sustain. The situation over the weekend had strengthened the evidence of the need to intervene, and there was now a significant on-flow of patients into critical care beds.
- 1.6 In order to balance the four harms effectively, TAC recommended urgent consideration and execution of a national fire-break to reduce the number of cases to a manageable level and then introduce a set of sustainable, national interventions to keep the 'R' rate around 1 while maximising social, economic and health benefits.

- 1.7 TAC recommended a two to three week hard fire-break. Alternative approaches considered would be to continue to tighten either national or local restrictions, but the desired outcome was far less likely and it potentially created greater uncertainty and fatigue. The preference was for a national lockdown commencing on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October, with the message that people needed to stay at home, except for very limited purposes, and it being lifted, to some extent, on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November, thereby covering three weekends.

## **Item 2: Schools**

- 2.1 The major issue that Cabinet would need to resolve was how to apply the restrictions to Secondary Schools following the half term break. It had already been agreed that Primary Schools should remain open to enable key staff, such as NHS staff and teachers, to remain in work.
- 2.2 There were three options: full return, with all pupils returning; partial return during week 2, for example, years 7 and 8 to return to school to address childcare issues; and no return for students, but teachers would return to provide online classes. All three of these options would allow the exams, scheduled for week commencing 2<sup>nd</sup> November, to take place.
- 2.3 *TAC advised that any school that remained open eroded the impact of the restrictions and closing all educational settings would make a significant impact on the 'R' rate.*
- 2.4 It was accepted that the observed levels of transmission in schools was low, as most cases presented were traced to exposure at home. There was a concern that children and young people had already faced significant disruption, which had been disproportionate to most of society. There was also a need to consider the mental health and well-being of pupils. It was reported that Local Authorities would prefer for all schools to remain open.
- 2.5 However, there was a risk of parents, grandparents and guardians mixing when dropping off and collecting children, and attending after school events. Therefore, in any event, there would be a need to issue clear guidance on the importance of maintaining social distancing. However, should secondary schools close or be partially closed, there was a concern that young people would continue to mix, but in an unregulated environment.
- 2.6 Before Cabinet could take a decision, there was a need to consider whether there was a greater risk of transmission in unregulated settings as opposed to schools.
- 2.7 It was noted that Higher Education Institutions would provide in-person and blended learning.

***Officials to provide further advice on the risk of transmission in unregulated settings as opposed to schools***

### **Item 3: Local Authorities and general restrictions**

- 3.1 It was reported that Local Authorities were continuing to prepare for the fire-break and had received briefing from the TAC on the severity of the spread of the virus. *There had been some queries on whether certain facilities, such as amenity centres, could remain open, but it was recognised that the priority should be schools.*
- 3.2 *There was concern about enforcement and questions about whether some activities, such as planning inspections, should continue to take place. It would be important to produce a clear set of FAQs.*
- 3.3 There was a general discussion about what could remain open during the two weeks and it was accepted that the fire-break would have a significant impact on the non-essential retail and the hospitality sector. However, the balance was ensuring that sufficient numbers of businesses closed and activities restricted to enable schools to remain open. Making a special case for certain premises, such as indoor gyms, could undermine the Government's overall message. While the case could be made for individual businesses or activities that would each have a marginal impact on the transmission rate, it was recognised that the cumulative effect would undermine the efficacy of the fire-break. In fact, rather than trying to reduce the number of restrictions, there may be a need to strengthen them.
- 3.4 *Some thought would need to be given to whether MOTs, driving lessons and tests should continue to take place and whether builders' merchants should remain open for the general public.*
- 3.5 *It was noted that as professional sportspeople were employed, they could continue to work, but this would not apply to elite sportspeople as they were classified as amateurs.*
- 3.6 Cabinet agreed that a stay at home requirement should be implemented, unless there was a reasonable excuse, and reasonable excuses should be kept to a minimum.

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

### **Item 4: Business support arrangements**

- 4.1 The Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales outlined the significant business support arrangements that would be put in place. There would be automated payments of £1,000 to businesses occupying a property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, whether or not they were required to close. In addition, there would be automated payments of £5,000 to businesses required to close during the firebreak lockdown period and occupying a property with a rateable value between £12,001 and £50,000. This would be administered by Local Authorities.

- 4.2 A discretionary £2,000 top-up grant could be made available on an application basis for businesses closed or materially affected by the lockdown and a further discretionary £1,000 grant could be made available to businesses on the same basis where they were materially affected by local lockdown measures for 21 days or more prior to the start of the fire-break period. The retaining of staff was a pre-condition of the grant schemes.
- 4.3 The overall cost of the package would be almost £300m, with £134.5m allocated from the centrally held COVID-19 reserve, £20m from the original £500m Economic Resilience Fund (ERF) package and the £160m ERF phase 3 funding would be re-purposed. *An additional £294m was being set aside for a potential further fire-break over the Winter.*
- 4.4 Employers would also be able to access the UK Government's wage support arrangements and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had been asked to bring forward, by one week, the commencement of the new expanded Job Support Scheme in Wales, to avoid businesses from having to make two separate applications. *There would be a need to ensure there was adequate support for the self-employed.*
- 4.5 It was reported that an extra £10m had been allocated to HEFCW for mental health services for students and to help those suffering financial hardship.
- 4.6 Public Transport would be operating on reduced timetables, particularly during off peak periods. Measures would be in place to support cross border routes and provide school transport.
- 4.7 *The fire-break period would be used to develop a new campaign to introduce, support and sustain the approach post lockdown. It would be important to discuss with the Third Sector measures to support the vulnerable in society. In addition, the BAME outreach groups should be engaged to encourage the use of the Workforce Risk Assessment Tool. It was hoped that some of the messaging would be available before the end of the week.*

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

***Item 5: Communications***

- 5.1 *Cabinet noted the arrangements to communicate the Government's decision, once taken, which included press conferences, written statements, a briefing pack and FAQs. There would be extensive discussions with stakeholders and television information notices were being prepared. The TAC report on the infection rate would also be published. There would be discussions with supermarkets on measures to help stop panic buying.*

- 5.2 *The First Minister would be speaking to the leaders of the Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru immediately after the Monday morning Cabinet meeting and a debate would be scheduled in the Senedd for Tuesday afternoon. There would also be a need to brief MPs.*
- 5.3 *It was suggested that news conferences could be held locally, thereby avoiding Ministers from having to travel significant distances.*
- 5.4 The First Minister confirmed that Cabinet would meet again the following morning to resolve the issues of children attending secondary schools and consider what progress had been made with self-isolation payments and fixed penalty notices. Ministers would also receive an update on proposals for shielding of the most vulnerable.
- 5.5 *It was agreed that officials would need to take into account comments made by Ministers.*

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

**Sections 29, 35 & 36**