

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE - CABINET

Cabinet will wish to note that these minutes, except those items in italics, will be published in week commencing 8th March 2021

**The Welsh Government
Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet
25th January 2021 (via Teams)**

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

Rebecca Evans MS
Vaughan Gething MS
Lesley Griffiths MS
Julie James MS
Eluned Morgan MS
Jeremy Miles MS
Ken Skates MS
Kirsty Williams MS
Jane Hutt MS

Hannah Blythyn 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 to the 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
Dan Butler, Special Adviser
Ian Butler, Special Adviser
Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
Sara 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 Policy Adviser
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

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Simon Brindle, Director Recovery and Restart

Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services

NR First Legislative Counsel

Tom Smithson, Deputy Director Restart

Liz Lalley, Deputy Director Recovery

[REDACTED]

Neil Buffin, Senior Lawyer

Name Redacted CMO's office

Name Redacted CMO's office

NR CMO's office

Duncan Hamer, Deputy Director Business

Jo Trott, Head of COVID-19 team

Name Redacted, Restart Social Policy

NR Restart Economy Policy

Item 1: Minutes of the previous meeting

- 1.1 Cymeradwydd y Cabinet gofnodion y 11 Ionawr / Cabinet approved the minutes of 11 January.

Item 2: Senedd Business

- 2.1 Cabinet considered the Plenary forward schedule and noted that two emergency questions had been tabled: one about the vaccination figures for the over 80s and the second on the flooding caused by Storm Christoph.

Item 3: Three week review of COVID-19 Regulations CAB(20-21)76

- 3.1 The First Minister introduced the paper, which asked Cabinet to discuss and agree an approach to the review of the Coronavirus Restrictions (No.5) Regulations, which was due by 28th January.
- 3.2 Ministers were reminded that the restrictions relating to COVID-19 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. There was a requirement that the Welsh Government should review these restrictions every three weeks.
- 3.3 The First Minister invited the CMO to provide the latest advice in respect of the transmission of the virus and the impact on the NHS.
- 3.4 Communal Community transmission rates across Wales had fallen since 8th January and the seven day average was around 228 in every 100,000 of the population. The positivity rate was around 15%. Only Pembrokeshire and Anglesey were now reporting increased cases, but this was from a low base.

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- 3.5 The precise impact of the new variant, which ~~was~~ could be up to 70% more likely to be transmitted, was still being researched. However, it was likely that the variant would be associated with high incidence rates, particularly in the South. It was noted that vaccine coverage was steadily increasing.
- 3.6 In terms of hospital capacity, the Chief Executive of the NHS reported that there were 2,700 confirmed, suspected or recovering COVID-19 patients occupying beds. Of these there were 1,400 confirmed cases.
- 3.7 *These were within the planning scenario, which suggested that there could have been as many as 3,500 suspected cases occupying beds at this stage if the Government had not intervened before Christmas. There was some concern over critical care capacity, as at one point there had been a 25% weekly growth in numbers, but this was now dropping by around 8% per week. Nevertheless, the intensive care units were still very busy with both COVID-19 and other patients.*
- 3.8 *These exceptional circumstances were becoming normalised within the NHS and hospitals were being flexible to help manage the extraordinary number of additional patients. However, this would have a long term impact on the ability of the NHS to deliver other health services.*
- 3.9 Cabinet agreed that, as indicators remained high across Wales and the capacity of the NHS was a matter of concern the country should remain at Alert Level 4 until the next review on 18th February. It would be important to ensure that in announcing this decision it was made clear that there would be a need for a sustained and significant improvement in transmission rates before the restrictions on businesses could be lifted. It was noted that the financial package to support business was available for the current financial year.
- 3.10 Ministers also agreed, for the reasons outlined within the paper, that two individuals from two different households should be able to exercise outdoors, providing they maintained social distancing. This was in line with guidelines in the Scotland and England. In addition, adults living alone and households with a single responsible adult would be able to reform their support bubble arrangements, providing a period of ten days had elapsed before forming a new one.
- 3.11 *There were questions over whether support bubbles might be amended to reflect what was happening in England in relation to new parents and parents with disabled children. It was noted that there would be a need for further information from the TAC before a decision could be taken on this suggestion.*
- 3.12 Furthermore, Cabinet agreed that standalone automatic car washes should be allowed to open, alongside those next to petrol stations and garages that were currently open. *There had been a suggestion from the police that this could lead to people using it as an excuse to leave their homes, but it was pointed out that only those travelling for valid reasons, such as for work, should be using these facilities. It was suggested that certain types of business that provided personal services, such as wigs and tattoos for medical reasons, and veterinary support*

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services, such as dog groomers, should be allowed to open. There should also be clarity on click and collect services. It was agreed that officials should provide a note on these issues.

Officials should provide a note on personal services, such as wigs and tattoos for medical reasons, and veterinary support services, such as dog groomers and clarity on click and collect services.

- 3.13 *In relation to travel restrictions within the Common Travel Area, it was agreed that a four nation approach should be taken, but as the principle of regulating travel between higher incidence areas and lower incidence areas was already well established, implementing restrictions should not be an issue.*
- 3.14 Ministers discussed a proposed approach to reinstating face to face education. It was the Government's principle that schools should be the last to close and the first to open and it was recognised that the current restrictions went beyond the requirements of Alert Level 4.
- 3.15 There would be further modelling later that week to assess the impact of the new variant and to ascertain the level of headroom required to re-open schools.
- 3.16 *Should it be possible, a phased re-opening was proposed from 22nd February, with the prioritisation of the Foundation Phase, remaining primary schools and years 11 and 13. The latter group was to help facilitate the production of evidence for the end year assessments that would be replacing examinations. It would also be important to encourage all vulnerable children to attend school settings.*
- 3.17 *Local Authorities were eager to have all schools open from 22nd February but there would be a need for further discussions with the relevant Trades Unions about the personal safety of teachers and support staff. In addition, schools needed sufficient notice to prepare for reopening.*
- 3.18 *Cabinet confirmed that schools should remain closed until 22nd February and agreed that any headroom available in the next review period should be used to prioritise making available more face to face education. In the meantime, officials would need to work with stakeholders to explore how such learning could resume after half term on a phased or restricted basis, subject to decreasing community prevalence.*
- 3.19 *In terms of Further Education, there would be a need to decouple provision from the issues facing schools and Ministers agreed that there should be a prioritised and phased return of post 16 learners after half term, with public health advice on limiting numbers on site at any one time. The work underway with the Higher Education sector on the options available to allow students to return with the appropriate safeguards in place was noted.*

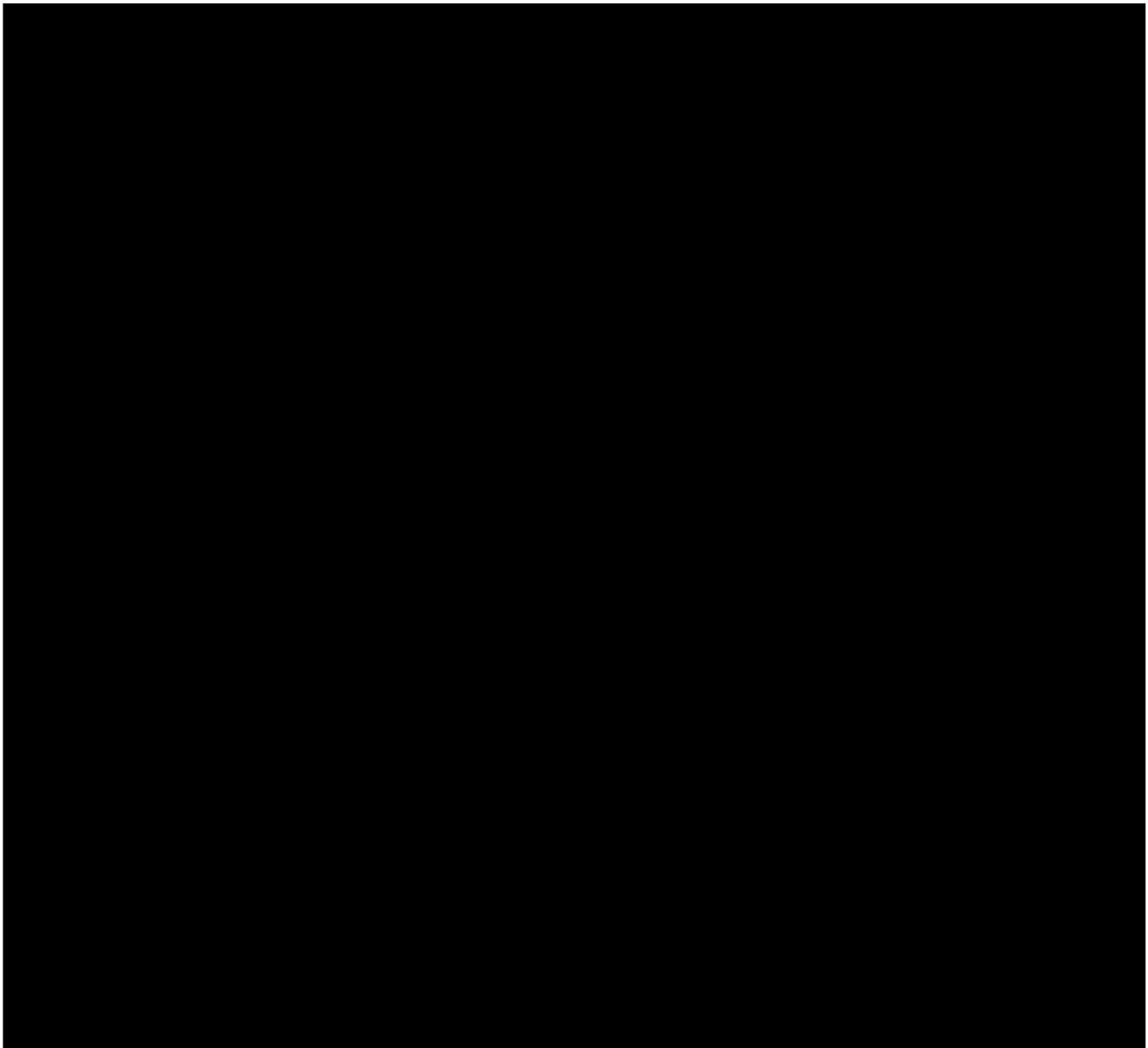
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- 3.20 *Ministers welcomed the accompanying EIA and CRIA papers and noted the deepening inequality issues that had been laid bare by the pandemic, which would need to be addressed throughout the ongoing recovery work.*
- 3.21 Ministers also noted the position on elections as outlined in the paper.
- 3.22 Cabinet agreed that officials would need to take into account the decisions made by Ministers in relation to the proposals within the paper.

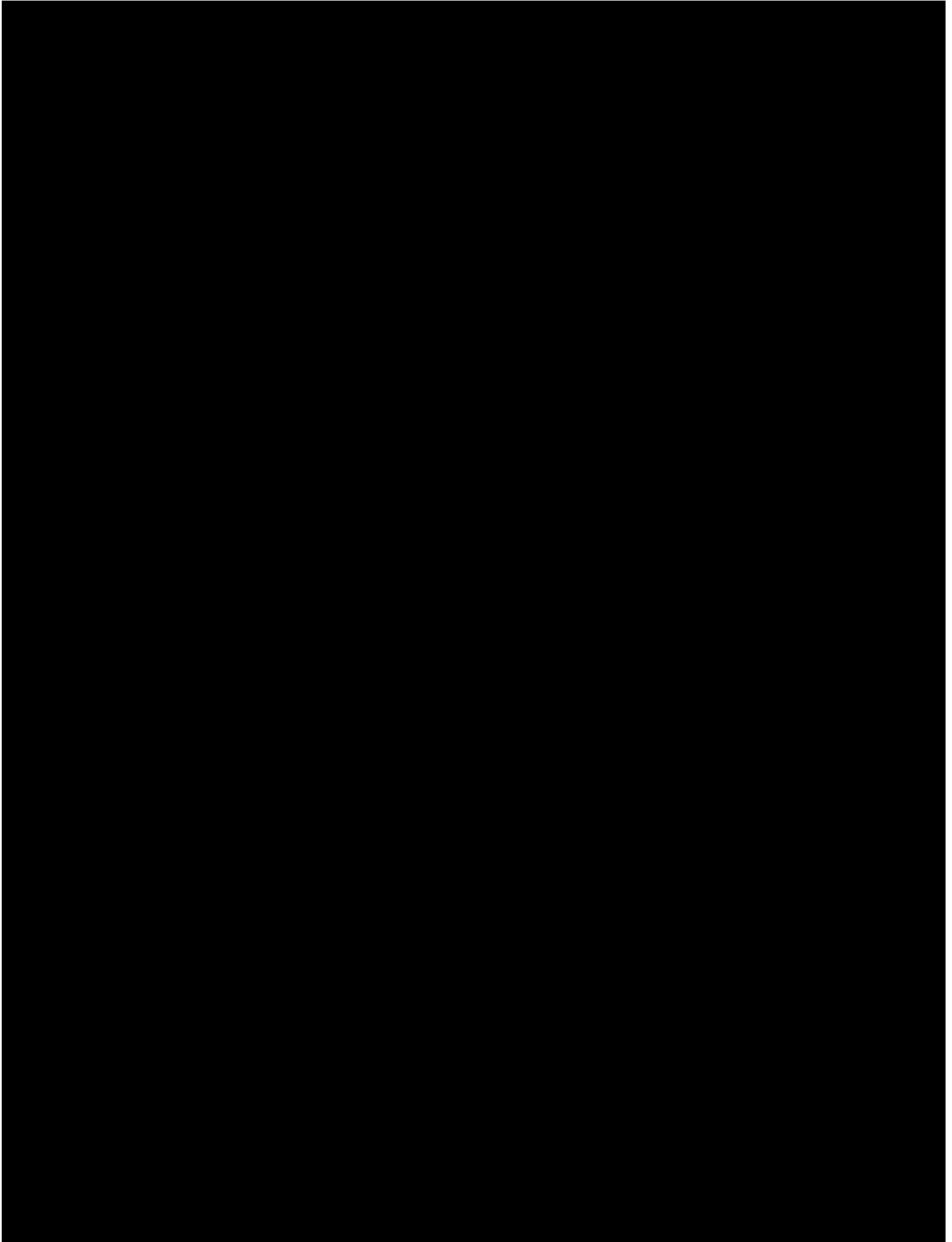
Officials to action the decisions made by Ministers

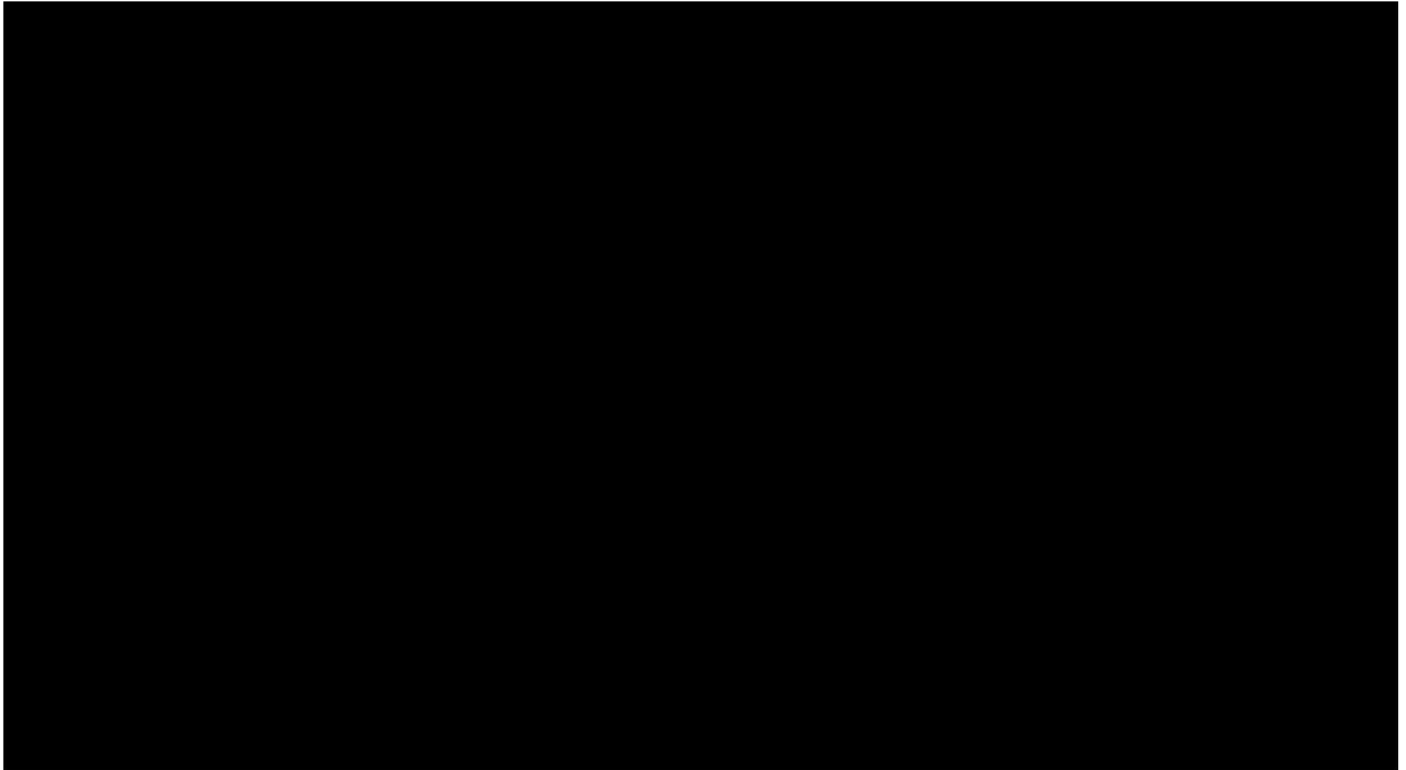
Sections .28, 35 & 36



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Item 5: Any other business

Data Monitor

- 5.1 *It was noted that the sub-analysis had been removed from the weekly Data Monitor to streamline the document, but this data would still be captured by officials and would be available to Ministers on request.*

Ministers' 9am Call

- 5.2 *The First Minister informed Cabinet that Ministers would be considering initial advice on potential changes to the balancing of the different harms of COVID-19 at their 9am call the following morning.*

Section 36

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**Action points and outcomes from a meeting of Cabinet
25th January 2021**

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE – Cabinet, Policy and Commercial in Confidence

<i>Item</i>	<i>Action / Outcome</i>	<i>Outcome/ Deadline</i>	<i>Officials</i>
<i>Item 3: Three week review of COVID-19 Regulations CAB(20-21)76</i>	<i>Officials should provide a note on personal services, such as wigs and tattoos for medical reasons, and veterinary support services, such as dog groomers and clarity on click and collect services.</i> <i>Officials to action the decisions made by Ministers</i>	<i>Asap</i>	<i>Tom Smithson / COVID-19 Project Team</i>
