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Nicola Sturgeon: 'Buck stops with me' on Scottish Covid tiers

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Covid in Scotland: FM wants to avoid Manchester lockdown situation

Nicola Sturgeon has insisted she will have the final say on local Covid-19 restrictions in different parts of Scotland, saying "the buck stops here".

The Scottish first minister said she would not "offload" decisions about local alert levels onto councils.

A lengthy row has played out between UK ministers and leaders in Manchester over imposing stricter rules there.

Ms Sturgeon said it was her "driving ambition" not to repeat this when a new multi-tier system begins in Scotland.

She said the government would "consult and be as collaborative as possible", but would ultimately make the decisions and would not be getting into "standoffs".

- **Tier 3 rules to be imposed on Greater Manchester**

Some 2.8 million people in Greater Manchester were left in limbo for more than a week during talks between ministers, mayors and MPs over whether the region would move into the top tier of England's Covid alert system.

The talks broke down after 10 days amid disagreements over financial support, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson has now confirmed the region will be placed in the "very high" alert level from Friday even without a deal.

Scotland is due to implement its own multi-tier system of restrictions after a set of short-term measures expires later in October.

Ms Sturgeon said she made no criticism of anyone involved in the "tough decisions" in Manchester, but said she would be aiming to avoid such a dispute.



GETTY IMAGES

The UK government has been in a standoff with local leaders in Greater Manchester over Covid-19 restrictions

The first minister said: "I believe it's really important that the buck for these difficult decisions stops here, with me and government.

"We are asking people to do extraordinary things right now, and it's not fair for me and the government to try to offload those onto other people, be it local authorities or health boards.

"We have to consult and be as collaborative as possible - we will absolutely be engaging with local authorities. And as we take decisions about which levels apply in which parts of the country we will want that to be collaborative.

"But ultimately we have to be able to take the decisions."

Ms Sturgeon said her government was "not in a position to get into standoffs over money", stressing the "finite resources" available to her.

She said: "What we are trying to do is give as much clarity and certainty as we can, have as much collaboration and discussion with those that need to be involved in these decisions as we can, not shy away from responsibility and ultimately me bearing the accountability for these decisions, and retaining a degree of flexibility in the face of an infectious virus.

"That is the balance we are trying to strike."



| Pubs in Scotland's central belt have been shut down by the current set of short-term restrictions

At her daily coronavirus briefing, Ms Sturgeon also hinted that **the current short-term restrictions** on bars and restaurants - which are chiefly focused on the central belt - could be extended for another week until the multi-tier system has been signed off by MSPs.

Rules clamping down on the hospitality trade are due to expire on 26 October, but MSPs will not vote on the government's "strategic framework" before then as Holyrood is in recess.

The first minister is to discuss the restrictions with her cabinet on Wednesday.

Asked if the current measures would be extended to cover the gap, she said: "If you look at the numbers across the central belt right now and the sequencing over the next week of moving to a new system, you might expect it might make sense from a public health point of view to see that rolled over.

"That is one option cabinet is looking at tomorrow.

"The regulations currently expire on Monday, so another option would be for that to be allowed to happen - we will look at the data and I will give the outcome of that tomorrow."

'Clear guidance'

Ms Sturgeon is to hold talks with opposition party leaders about the next steps on Tuesday afternoon, including Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross.

The Tory MP said he would "look at everything as constructively as possible", but said there had been a "lack of clear guidance" from the Scottish government to firms.

He said: "When they were given just 50 hours' notice to introduce these further restrictions, what was the guidance from the Scottish government to businesses about how they could change and adapt to make sure they could open again safely?

"It seems nothing has happened, nothing has been developed in that area and businesses are once again hearing through the daily briefing that these restrictions may last far longer."

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