

**The Welsh Government
Minutes of meetings of the Cabinet
25 & 28 October 2021**

- Present: Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS (Chair)
Rebecca Evans MS
Vaughan Gething MS
Jane Hutt MS
Julie James MS
Jeremy Miles MS
Eluned Morgan MS
Mick Antoniw MS
- Hannah Blythyn MS
Dawn Bowden MS (28 October)
Julie Morgan MS
Lynne Neagle MS
- Apologies: Lesley Griffiths MS
Dawn Bowden MS (25 October)
Lee Waters MS
- Officials: Des Clifford, Director General Office of the First Minister
Will Whiteley, Deputy Director Cabinet Division
Toby Mason, Strategic Communications
Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
Madeleine Brindley, Special Adviser
Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
Daniel Butler, Special Adviser
Ian Butler, Special Adviser
Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
Sara Faye, Special Adviser
Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser
Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
Name Redacted Cabinet Office (25 October)
Christopher W Morgan, Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
Name Redacted Cabinet Secretariat
Andrew Goodall, Director General, Health
Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, COVID-19 Crisis Coordination
Frank Atherton, CMO
Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Officer – Health
Fliss Bennee, Co-Chair TAC
Liz Lalley, Director Recovery
Tom Smithson, COVID-19 Restart
Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services (25 October)

Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel (25 October)
Neil Buffin, Senior Lawyer
Terry Kowall, Senior Legislative Counsel (28 October)

Item 1: Review of Coronavirus Restrictions (No. 5) Regulations – 28 October 2021

25 October

- 1.1 The First Minister introduced the paper, which sought a steer on the current review period of the Coronavirus Restrictions (No. 5) Regulations.
- 1.2 Ministers were reminded that the restrictions relating to COVID-19 within the Coronavirus Control Plan 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 The First Minister invited the Chief Medical Officer to provide an overview of the current public health situation.
- 1.4 Wales continued to have the highest infection rates in the UK. The seven day average infection rate was now around 650 in every 100,000 of the population, with a 20% positivity rate for testing. The infection rates in the over 60s were also increasing.
- 1.5 The Chief Executive of the NHS informed Ministers that Health Boards were still under a great deal of pressure, of which responding to the pandemic was one contributing factor.
- 1.6 There were currently 726 COVID-19 patients occupying hospital beds, 520 of which were confirmed cases, and 53 people were in critical care units. The virus continued to have an impact on how NHS services were delivered as patients had to be managed through the system, while hospitals responded to staff shortages due to sickness and self-isolation requirements.
- 1.7 Given the ongoing public health situation, Cabinet agreed that the restrictions should be maintained for the current review period. However, there was a need to consider how these mitigations could be strengthened to avoid moving to COVID Urgent.
- 1.8 The messaging that would support the announcement on Friday would need to stress the need for people to continue to take precautions, while explaining that if the harms of COVID-19 increased there would be a need to re-introduce tighter restrictions.

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE - CABINET

Cabinet will wish to note that these minutes, except those items in italics, will be published in week commencing 6 December 2021

- 1.9 In terms of the vaccination programmes, it was noted that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation was considering whether it was possible to reduce the timeframe between administering the second dose and the booster. The number of young people infected with the virus had delayed the roll-out of the programme aimed at 12-15 year olds. It was hoped the numbers would increase during the half term holiday and there should be a focus on immunising exam year students.
- 1.10 Cabinet agreed that more should be done to encourage people to return to working from home during the winter months.
- 1.11 The Government should lead by example, while encouraging the public, private and third sectors to do the same.
- 1.12 There were ongoing concerns about the use of face coverings in retail, particularly in supermarkets, and it was agreed the First Minister, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales and Trefnydd and the Minister for the Economy would meet with the sector to remind them of their obligations to their staff and customers.
- 1.13 Ministers noted the feedback from the introduction of the mandatory use of COVID passes for entry into certain sporting venues, nightclubs and other high risk venues and considered whether its use should be extended to other settings.
- 1.14 Cabinet would return to this issue later in the week.
- 1.15 Cabinet recognised that the policy on isolation and testing may need to be reconsidered following further evidence from a recent clinical study.
- 1.16 It was agreed that Cabinet would return to the issues later in the week.
- 1.17 Cabinet noted the paper and agreed that officials should proceed in-line with the decisions made by Ministers.

28 October

- 2.1 Cabinet returned to the outstanding issues from the meeting earlier in the week. Officials had provided briefing notes on the potential to extend the mandatory use of the COVID pass and proposals to change self-isolation requirements of household contacts.
- 2.2 It was accepted that the use of the COVID pass had a valuable role in signalling the escalating threat of the virus given the increasing number of cases.
- 2.3 Ministers considered the proposals in the briefing note and agreed the mandatory use of the pass should not be applied to the wider hospitality industry as part of the current review of the Regulations. However, at his press conference the following

day, the First Minister should signal the intention that it should be applied to larger venues at the next review period, should infection rates continue to rise.

- 2.4 Nevertheless, venues could still ask customers to use the pass as part of their reasonable control measures and also encourage people to take lateral flow tests.
- 2.5 In terms of leisure and entertainment venues, cinemas, theatres and concert halls already had controlled entry procedures in place and could implement additional checks for COVID passes. It was agreed that the mandatory use of the pass would be applied to these venues. This would be announced as part of the press conference and implemented in two weeks. This precautionary approach would allow such entertainment venues to remain open during the Winter months.
- 2.6 It was noted that care homes and hospitals already had robust entry control measures for visitors.
- 2.7 Cabinet agreed the cap on the size of events requiring a COVID pass should remain in place, which was aligned with the rest of the UK.
- 2.8 Ministers discussed the proposals for reintroducing self-isolation requirements and agreed that if a member of a household tested positive then everyone in that home should self-isolate until they had received a negative PCR test. However, an exemption for 16 and 17 year olds should remain in place for now, not least because of the need to study for examinations. Ministers would keep this under review and revisit should transmission rates not improve.