

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE - CABINET

Cabinet will wish to note that these minutes, except those items in italics, will be published in week commencing 5th July 2021

**The Welsh Government
Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet
27th May & 3rd June 2021 (via Teams)**

Present: Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS
Rebecca Evans MS
Vaughan Gething MS
Lesley Griffiths MS
Jane Hutt MS
Julie James MS
Jeremy Miles MS
Eluned Morgan MS
Mick Antoniw MS

Dawn Bowden MS
Hannah Blythyn MS
Julie Morgan MS
Lynne Neagle MS
Lee Waters MS

Officials: Shan Morgan, Permanent Secretary (27 May)
Will Whiteley, Deputy Director Cabinet Division
Toby Mason, Head of 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
Mitch Theaker, Special Adviser
Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
Christopher W Morgan, Cabinet Secretariat (minutes, 27 May)

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 Cabinet Secretariat (minutes, 3 June)
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 (27 May)
Chris Jones, Deputy CMO (3 June)
Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Adviser for Health
Fliss Bennee, Co-Chair TAC
Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel (27 May)
Phil Elkin, Deputy Director Legal Services
Tom Smithson, Deputy Director Restart
Jason Thomas, Director, Culture Tourism and Sport (27 May)

- 1.7 Cabinet had previously signalled that, should the public health improvements continue, it would be possible to consider moving to Alert Level 1 from 7th June, should conditions remain favourable at that time. This would entail changing the rules on meeting indoors in private dwellings, amending social distancing guidance in private homes and outdoors applying the maximum limit of 30 people meeting to all outdoor areas, including gardens.
- 1.8 Given the low rates and stable position in Wales, there was arguably more time to respond, should evidence emerge of any relaxations causing negative effects in Wales or elsewhere in the UK. There was also the need to consider the increasing economic and social costs of maintaining restrictions, particularly on those with lower wage levels, younger people and those with low skills. There was also the impact on disabled people, those with poor health and the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.
- 1.9 There was also the potential loss of major events permanently to other countries. It was therefore recommended that, subject to conditions remaining stable over the next week and that additional evidence on the Delta variant did not change the assessment of risk, there should be a move to Alert Level 1 on 7th June.
- 1.10 Cabinet acknowledged there was a need to continue with the cautious and gradual steps, ever mindful of the cumulative impact of future events, and agreed with the recommendation. However, it was agreed that they would need to meet again the following Thursday to confirm this position, when further evidence on the spread and impact of the Delta variant was known.
- 1.11 In the meantime, officials would need to revisit the Alert Levels within the Coronavirus Control Plan to ensure that they were fit for purpose now that the Delta variant was becoming the most dominant strain. Officials would also need to provide advice about the respective public health risk associated with each of the proposed easements under Alert Level 1 so that Ministers may make informed decisions next Thursday should there be a need to consider a partial lifting of restrictions.
- 1.12 It was suggested that some thought should be given to vaccinating children and young people given the number of cases of the Delta variant within this age group in England.
- 1.13 Cabinet discussed the proposals for limiting the number of people at events and concluded that the Welsh Government should follow the model in England of indoor seated of up to 1,000, outdoor standing of up to 4,000 and outdoor seated of up to 10,000. The pilots had demonstrated what could be achieved safely.
- 1.14 The model provided a ceiling for capacity limits, and organisers would be required to adhere to the other rules in the regulations such as social distancing, risk assessments and the restrictions on hospitality, which would have an overall

Cabinet reconvened on 3rd June to continue discussion from 27th May

Item 2: Options for a phased move to Alert Level 1

- 2.1 The Deputy Chief Medical Officer reported that the situation in Wales remained one of low disease prevalence, with infection rates stable at approximately 7.4 per 100k. COVID-19 pressure on the NHS was low, but a significant non-COVID backlog was being dealt with and any increase in COVID patients could impact how the backlog was managed.
- 2.2 Case rates had been growing exponentially in Scotland for around 3 weeks and in England for more than a week. Northern Ireland and Wales had seen stable case rates over the same time, but this may change as more community transmission took place with the easing of restrictions. The Delta variant was a particular concern, particularly in Conwy, but TTP appeared to be containing outbreaks in Wales to date.
- 2.3 A further rise in cases across Wales could be expected as the Delta variant spread across the UK and early signs showed the existing combination of vaccinations and restrictions may not be sufficient to keep Rt below 1 in England or Scotland. A meeting of SAGE would follow immediately after Cabinet and further evidence would then be available on the likely impact of the Delta variant in Wales.
- 2.4 Taking the above into account, the public health advice was for the move to Alert Level 1 to be staggered to delay the most risky relaxations, including those relating to indoor mixing and events. Delaying some easements in this way should provide enough data to indicate whether the UK had entered a third wave and the degree to which increased cases translated into hospitalisations and deaths.
- 2.5 The proposal was for a two-stage move to Alert Level 1 beginning on 7 June, with mostly outdoor changes. The second stage would include the indoor elements of Alert Level 1 two weeks later on 21 June.
- 2.6 Cabinet agreed that households could be extended from 7 June, with up to three households and a support bubble, which was the only indoor easement from this date.
- 2.7 The discussion then focused on the options set out in relation to outdoor unregulated and regulated gatherings. The first option was to align with rules in England, the second was to adopt a multiplier approach according to an approximate calculation of the relative risk.
- 2.8 In relation to outdoor unregulated gatherings, concerns were raised about the potential for confusion if Wales were to move away from the numbers in place the previous summer in Wales, and which England would be applying, which was 30

people who could meet in private gardens, outdoors in regulated settings, and in public spaces.

- 2.9 For outdoor regulated gatherings, such as sporting events, wedding receptions and spectator events, Cabinet agreed that justifying a move away from the levels set in England would be problematic and would not necessarily drive the right compliance behaviour, as people may feel that variation was being imposed unnecessarily. That view was supported by the focus group data in the weekly monitor.
- 2.10 It was reported the Police were comfortable with the suggested number of 30 at outdoor gatherings and Local Authorities would also support them.
- 2.11 Noting the continued uncertainty around the impact of the Delta variant, Ministers agreed to split the move to Alert Level 1 into two stages and agreed that maximum capacities should be set at 30 people for outdoor gatherings, 4,000 for standing events and 10,000 for seated events.
- 2.12 Cabinet noted the proposed changes for 21 June would be signalled at the press conference the following day, but there was a further opportunity to consider them in light of the public health situation during the week of 14 June, before a final decision was taken on the easements.
- 2.13 The final decision to be taken that day was in relation to removing the current restriction on evictions.
- 2.14 It was reported the Regulations currently preventing evictions were due to expire on 30 June and a package of measures to support tenants at risk of such proceedings was being worked up.
- 2.15 Cabinet noted that advice services across Wales were working together with the Welsh Government to formulate the package and would assist in communicating it to those in need.
- 2.16 Given the package was unlikely to be ready for implementation prior to the end of June, Cabinet agreed the Regulations should be allowed to expire at month end.
- 2.17 In reaching that conclusion Cabinet noted the risk of judicial review by Landlords was assessed as being low to medium, as the sector and tenants had already been made aware the Regulations were due to expire on 30 June. In addition, any scheme to assist those in rent arrears should ultimately benefit Landlords.
- 2.18 The significant additional cost associated with tackling homelessness was also a factor in seeking to keep tenants in their properties whenever possible, and it was suggested the Welsh Government's successful work in combatting homelessness throughout the pandemic could be emphasised at the press conference the following day.