

Coronavirus restrictions on the hospitality sector

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Rhagfyr 2020
Petitions Committee | 15 December 2020

Reference: RS20/14831-1

Petition Number: P-05-1099

Petition title: Don't shut the Hospitality Sector (Pubs, Restaurants, Cafes) without providing scientific evidence.

Text of petition: The Welsh hospitality sector has proven that it is able to comply effectively with the strict COVID regulations, with pubs, bars, restaurants, cafés, and many other settings being equipped to deal with social distancing. Hospitality has already adapted to using PPE, extra hygiene measures, as well as the government's track and trace system.

Evidence from the government and the Office of National Statistics shows that only between 1% and 3% of new coronavirus infections are transmitted in pubs, bars, and restaurants. Unless the Welsh Government is willing to publish evidence that shows a greater risk of transmission in hospitality settings, then it would be unfair to penalise the industry once again by shutting it down throughout December.

Pubs, and the hospitality industry generally, have been among the hardest-hit sectors during lockdown. More than a third of hospitality firms say they have little or no confidence of surviving the next three months, according to data collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) earlier this month.

This year has left the hospitality sector on the verge of collapse, with much of it being closed throughout 2020 due to the pandemic. Christmas trade is essential for businesses to remain open, and prevent many from having to close for good due to a loss of earnings.



Petition Number: P-05-1100

Petition title: Allow pubs and restaurants in Wales to serve alcohol/stay open after 6pm

Text of petition: Restrictions announced by Mark Drakeford will come into force 6pm, 4th December, which will see the hospitality industry forbidden from selling alcohol, and having to close at 6pm. These new restrictions will be detrimental to the hospitality industry and they need our support.

Venues still can't run at full capacity which means businesses are struggling through these difficult times. But now what will make things much worse is the fact that from Friday, 4th December onwards, venues are now being told to stop selling alcohol and to close at 6pm, which will have a devastating impact on the industry. Many of which are family run business, who in the coming weeks, rely on what many would consider to be the busiest time of the year, which is essential for their businesses and livelihoods.

1. Background

On 30 November 2020 the First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford MS, announced new measures were being introduced “as cases of coronavirus accelerate in Wales”. Since 4 December pubs, bars, restaurants and cafes have not been able to serve alcohol and have been required to close by 6pm and only provide takeaways after that time.

On 1 December the First Minister made a statement in Plenary on the December restrictions. He said that the Welsh Government recognised “the enormous effort made by the [hospitality] sector to comply with the regulations” but that “similar restrictions have had to be introduced in all other parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, across the world”. The First Minister stated that:

The consumption of alcohol has been identified by health officials and policy makers internationally as increasing the risk of transmission, as social distancing can break down as people have an altered perception of risk.

In response to the First Minister’s statement the Leader of the Opposition, Paul Davies MS, said that “we’re in a public health crisis [...] but we’re also in the middle of an economic crisis too”. Paul Davies voiced his concerns for areas in Wales with

low transmission rates and areas “where there’s no evidence that hospitality interaction is leading to an increase in transmission rates”.

The First Minister said that “the evidence is there” and referred to two papers published by the UK Government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) in November which, he says, review “the measures that have succeeded across the United Kingdom”. These papers are cited below.

2. Publications from scientific advisory groups

There are two main bodies that provide scientific advice used by the Welsh Government.

The Technical Advisory Cell (TAC) is an advisory body of the Welsh Government. It provides “scientific and technical advice to support Welsh Government decision makers during emergencies”. This includes providing regular updates from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales to senior Welsh Government officials about outputs from SAGE. TAC regularly publishes summaries of the advice it provides to the Welsh Government along with more subject specific research.

The UK Government’s SAGE is responsible for ensuring “timely and coordinated scientific advice is made available to decision makers to support UK cross-government decisions”. It relies on external science and advice from expert groups including its own sub-groups such as the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (SPI-M) and the Independent Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Behaviours (SPI-B). Publications from SAGE are also available on the UK Government’s website.

2.1. SAGE papers referred to the by First Minister

On 12 November SAGE considered a paper from its modelling sub-group (SPI-M) on tiers in England and other measures in the devolved nations. This is one of the SAGE papers that the First Minister referred to in Plenary.

The second paper that the First Minister referred to was from the Impact of Interventions Task and Finish Group dated 19 November on the four nations’ autumn interventions. This paper was updated on 26 November.

2.2. Hospitality settings and transmission

SAGE and TAC have published other papers which includes references to the hospitality sector and the transmission of COVID-19. These include, but are not limited to:

- [Non-pharmaceutical interventions \(NPIs\) table](#), 21 September 2020 (SAGE)
- [SARS-COV-2: Transmission Routes and Environments](#), 22 October 2020 (SAGE)
- [SAGE 63 minutes: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) response](#), 22 October 2020
- [Summary of evidence on costs and benefits and potential mitigations for measures to address COVID-19 in Wales](#), 25 November 2020 (TAC)

3. The impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality sector

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carries out a [Business Impact of COVID-19 survey](#) that “captures businesses’ responses on how their turnover, workforce prices, trade and business resilience have been affected”. The responses are published fortnightly.

The [publication on 19 November 2020](#) covered the period 19 October to 1 November 2020. In that survey 27.8% of the accommodation and food services industry said they had low confidence that their business would survive the next three months.

Since the announcement by the First Minister on 30 November, a number of [hospitality businesses have said they will be closing](#) from 4 December and expressed their frustration with the new restrictions.

While [UK Hospitality welcomed the economic support package](#) being provided by the Welsh Government, it described the restrictions as a “massive blow to hospitality in Wales” and feel that the sector is “unjustly bearing the brunt of Government actions”.

3.1. Hospitality restrictions in the other UK nations

3.1.a. Scotland

On 2 November 2020 the Scottish Government introduced COVID protection levels. Each area of Scotland has been assigned to one of the five different protection levels from level 0 through to the highest at level 4.

Restaurants, bars, pubs and cafes in level 3 areas “can open indoors and outdoors for the consumption of food and non-alcoholic drinks”. Alcoholic drinks cannot be served, and the premises must be closed by 6pm.

In level 4 areas, restaurants, bars, pubs and cafes are closed and they can only provide takeaway services. There are eleven areas in Scotland under level 4 restrictions until at least 11 December 2020.

3.1.b. Northern Ireland

From 27 November to 10 December 2020 Northern Ireland has a “stay at home” message in place. As a result, hospitality venues are closed apart from being able to provide takeaways, deliveries and a drive-through service.

3.1.c. England

On 2 December 2020 the national restrictions in England were replaced by a tiered system. Each area in England is in one of three tiers.

Under tier 2, pubs and bars are closed unless they operate as a restaurant. Alcohol can only be served with “substantial meals” and premises must stop taking order after 10pm and be closed by 11pm.

All hospitality settings are closed in tier 3 areas and can only provide takeaway, delivery or drive-through services. Twenty-five areas in England are under tier 3.

4. Legislation in Wales

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 4) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the regulations”) underpin the current national restrictions across Wales. The Welsh Government has amended the regulations through the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions and Functions of Local Authorities) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2020 to require bars, cafes, canteens, restaurants and pubs to

be close between 6pm and 6am and to prevent the sale of alcohol for consumption in those settings. There are some exceptions to the restrictions on closing times, including premises located in workplaces, educational settings, and hospitals for example.

The [regulations will be reviewed](#) by the Welsh Ministers by Thursday 17 December, and at least once in every three week period after that date.

The Welsh Government has published [frequently asked questions on the regulations](#).

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.