

Increase the number of people allowed to attend wedding receptions

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 01 Rhagfyr 2020
Petitions Committee | 01 December 2020

Reference: RS20/14570-6

Petition Number: P-05-1057

Petition title: Increase the number of people allowed to attend wedding receptions.

Text of petition: We have a wedding planned for the end of October, but currently cannot have a reception following with all of our guests. We could have a meal in a restaurant but not a 'reception'.

Northern Ireland currently allows venues to limit the numbers based on the size of the venue and safe social distancing. We would like to see this introduced in Wales. Giving parity between the restaurant/bar industry and the wedding industry.

The current regulations and lack of timeline moving forward have left hundreds of couples in limbo and under a huge amount of stress, during what should be the happiest time of their lives.



1. Background

On the 23 March 2020, in order to halt the spread of coronavirus, restrictions on gatherings and the movement of people, along with the closure of non-essential businesses were introduced. Among the premises required to close were places of worship, registry offices, wedding venues and hospitality businesses. As a result, wedding and civil partnership ceremonies and receptions were postponed or cancelled.

In early June 2020, the First Minister announced some of the first easing of restrictions in Wales, but this did not extend to weddings and civil partnership ceremonies. The only exception to the restriction was in circumstances where one of the couple had a terminal illness.

As the number of infections decreased over time, further gradual easing of restrictions were announced. In mid-June 2020, places of worship and registry offices were allowed to conduct ceremonies once again, as reported in this BBC Wales news article. However, this did not extend to wedding and civil partnership receptions. Further amendments to the regulations were made on 21 August (now revoked), which did allow up to 30 people to attend a reception to celebrate the solemnisation of a marriage or civil partnership in a regulated premises. The limit of 30 at the time applied to receptions held indoors or outdoors.

During September and October 2020, a number of 'local lockdowns' were enforced in areas of Wales. The regulations placed specific restrictions on the movement and gathering of people, although it was still considered a reasonable excuse to travel in or out of a **local health protection area** to attend the **solemnization** of a marriage or civil partnership. Receptions were also allowed at the time, but **all guest** at a wedding reception had to be resident within the health protection area.

On 19 October 2020, the First Minister announced that Wales would enter a two-week fire-break lockdown. The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 3) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (now revoked) placed new restrictions on the movement and gathering of people. Attending the solemnization of a marriage or formation of a civil partnership was allowed during the fire-break lockdown, but receptions or celebrations following the ceremony were prohibited.

A new set of national rules and guidance were introduced on 9 November 2020.

2. Welsh Government action

The rules on holding wedding receptions

Part 2 of the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 4\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) (as amended) imposes limits on meeting other people (referred to as “participating in gatherings”) and on events.

Regulation 4 limits gatherings in people’s homes to those who form part of an extended household (or “bubble”). Regulation 6 provides that a limited number of people (4 people excluding children under 11) from different households can meet away from the home. However, there are some limited exceptions to these rules where it may be reasonably necessary to gather and there is no reasonably practicable alternative.

Exceptions include certain “organised” activities involving up to 15 people meeting indoors and 30 people outdoors. Examples of what might constitute an exceptions for a gathering are provided under Regulation 6(5). One such exception in the Regulations is to allow a limited number of people to gather to attend a reception to celebrate a marriage or civil partnership.

Regulation 6(6)(e) makes exceptions for:

- participating in a gathering of **no more than 15 people**, not including persons under the age of 11, at regulated premises to—
 - (i) celebrate a solemnisation of a marriage or formation of a civil partnership that takes place on or after 22 August 2020.

The guidance

A wedding or civil partnership reception can be held for up to 15 people at a regulated premises (such as pubs, restaurants, hotels or community centres), as long as ‘all reasonable measures’ are taken to minimise the risk of spreading of coronavirus. This will include limitations on the type of activity that can take place – for example loud music should not be played, and any food provided should be served at the table rather than at a buffet. The limit on those who can be present do not include children under 11 or staff working at the event.

The Welsh Government’s [guidance on the national rules](#) state:

A maximum of 15 people can attend a wedding or civil partnership reception or a wake after a funeral, as long as this takes place in a

regulated premises. The number of people who can attend a wedding or civil partnership ceremony or funeral depends on the premises in which it takes place.

Information for regulated premises on the rules for holding wedding receptions can be found in the [guidance on holding wedding receptions](#).

Whilst holding receptions at regulated premises is prescribed in law, there is also a regulation that provides for holding and attending outdoor events. Regulation 6(6)(j) of the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 4\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) (as amended) makes provision for people to participate in or facilitate an **outdoor organised activity** at which no more than 30 people are in attendance. This figure does not include under 11s, and no alcohol can be consumed at such an event.

While the regulation does not specifically refer to wedding or civil partnership receptions, the Welsh Government's '[Guidance to local authorities, approved premises and places of worship on marriages and civil partnerships: coronavirus](#)' states:

Wedding receptions of up to 15 people are permitted indoors or organised events of up to 30 people can take place outdoors. The consumption of alcohol is permitted as part of the indoor celebration but this should only accompany a sit-down meal.

3. Senedd action

The Senedd's Petitions Committee has previously considered a [petition calling for wedding ceremonies to be permitted during the first national lockdown](#). This petition was introduced before wedding ceremonies were allowed to proceed, and did not relate to wedding receptions.

On 23 of September 2020, [Mark Isherwood MS in a written question to Ministers](#) asked whether the Welsh Government had 'any immediate plans to reduce wedding receptions limits from 30 to 15 people as in England?'. The Welsh Government's response stated that:

We have no current plans to amend the 30 person limit for wedding receptions. We will continue to keep the position under review but at present, there is no substantive evidence that weddings and receptions have been the source of significant transmission.

On the **3 November 2020 in an oral statement in Plenary**, the First Minister confirmed that:

There will be a separate exception for up to 15 people to attend a reception for a wedding or civil partnership or a funeral wake, and children under 11 will not count towards the limits on meeting others in these regulated settings.

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.