

Ministerial Update:

- The Minister confirmed that subject to ongoing scientific analysis regarding the Omicron variant and its potential impact upon public health, Cabinet had discussed as part of the next 21 Day Review;
 - o Wales remaining at Alert Level 0 – however, given the rapidly evolving situation, moving to a timetable of weekly reviews/announcements from 10/12;
 - o Extending Covid Passes to hospitality settings will not be undertaken at this time – this ensures consistency with the decision, yesterday, by UK Government to bring in the ‘Plan B’ changes and mirror those already implemented in Wales of: masks in most public places, Covid passes for some venues and work from home guidance;
 - o Further messaging to public to – wear masks indoors (clarification that required when not actively eating /drinking); prioritise vaccination (including Employers to support staff in getting vaccinated) and use of LFTs before meeting in groups.
- The Minister confirmed that it was Welsh Government’s intention to maintain a 4-Nations approach as far as was possible and had called upon UK Treasury to engage in discussions early regarding further business support, as this would have to be supported by UK Government in the event that further restrictions/interventions were required.

Comments from Industry / wider stakeholders:

- UK Hospitality Cymru thanked the Minister for the ongoing engagement, They flagged that trade in hospitality settings in Wales was approximately 20% down on usual Xmas period and anticipated to fall further as cancellations being made for Christmas parties etc. UKH-Cymru asked for clarity on the decision to maintain VAT/ business rate relief in Wales post April 2022.
- British Beer + Pub Association echoed UK-C comments and noted concerns in consumer confidence as a result of the latest round of uncertainty due to the new variant.
- Celtic Group reported a £1m loss in the last week due to Covid - cancellations made within the business group.
- UNITE Wales / Wales TUC highlighted the impact upon employees who were on casual contracts and suffering from being laid off by businesses and called for clarity on a further Furlough scheme. Also, impact upon staff having to deal with the public and hostility around implementation of Covid Passes.
- South Wales Police asked for as much notice as possible in terms of implementation of changes/ new restrictions in order to work with communities and businesses to mitigate compliance fatigue/tension as far as possible. From a practical point of view, weekend changes were harder to oversee than those introduced within the working week.
- Events sector flagged up ongoing issues for the industry due to consumer uncertainty, increased costs and call for further support to be considered. Also noted was international travel to the opening of ski season / Rise Festival in Les Deux Alps and risk of increased Covid cases.

Minister's response:

- The Minister thanked stakeholders for their comments - noting that their views/feedback would be taken on board as Cabinet was considering all data available regarding the Omicron Variant in terms of transferability, efficacy of vaccinations and rate of infections resulting in hospitalisation. It was currently anticipated that the wave of cases linked to this variant would peak in Wales in late January, potentially a later date than other parts of the UK, and that he appreciated the uncertainty that this latest stage of the Covid pandemic was causing with the public and wider tourism sector.
- The Minister anticipated that further support for businesses inc the wider tourism sector, would be required as he recognised the ongoing impact of Covid and the financial viability of some businesses was at risk as a result. Discussions around VAT/Business Rate relief would be taken as part of the draft budget and a statement is planned for 20 December.
- The intention is to keep the wider sector updated on any changes with as much notice as possible, however, this may not be possible given the fast-moving situation. At this time, it is anticipated to reconvene the group for an update next week prior to the Weekly Review,