



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Cabinet meeting: 7 February 2022

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on 7 February 2022.

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Present

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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

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- Lee Waters MS

Officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Des Clifford, Director General Office of the First Minister
- Will Whiteley, Deputy Director Cabinet Division
- Toby Mason, Strategic Communications
- Jane Runeckles, 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
- Owen John, Special Adviser
- Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser
- Mitch Theaker, Special Adviser
- Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat
- Catrin Sully, Cabinet Office
- Tracey Burke, Director General, Education and Public Services
- Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, COVID-19 Crisis Coordination
- Judith Paget, Director General Health
- Andrew Slade, Director General, Economy, Skills and Natural Resources
- Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services
- Frank Atherton, CMO
- Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Adviser – Health
- Liz Lalley, Director Recovery and Restart
- Tom Smithson, Deputy Director COVID-19 Restart
- Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel
- Neil Buffin, Deputy Director Legal Services
- Gawain Evans, Director of Finance
- Sharon Bounds, Deputy Director Financial Controls

- Piers Bisson, Director European Transition, Constitution and Justice
- James Gerard, Deputy Director Justice
- Karin Phillips, Deputy Director Community Safety Division

Item 1: Minutes of previous meetings

1.1 Cymeradwydd y Cabinet gofnodion y 31 Ionawr / Cabinet approved the minutes of 31 January.

Item 2: Senedd business

2.1 Cabinet considered the contents of the Plenary grid and noted voting time was scheduled for 6:40pm on Tuesday and around 6:35pm on Wednesday. Plenary would be meeting in hybrid format with up to 30 Members in the Siambr.

Item 3: Coronavirus Restrictions (no. 5) Regulations 21 Day Review – 10 February

3.1 The First Minister introduced the paper that summarised the improving public health situation and set out the considerations for the 3 week review of the Coronavirus Restrictions (no. 5) Regulations, which was due by 10 February 2022.

3.2 Ministers were reminded 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.

3.3 The First Minister invited the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Executive of the NHS in Wales to provide an overview of the current public health situation.

3.4 There was still a high level of community transmission, but whilst some ongoing harm from the virus remained unavoidable, the vaccination programme and the lower severity from Omicron meant these harms were much less than the original modelling suggested.

3.5 There was cautious optimism that the situation was improving and a gradual easing of protections was recommended. It was important to continue work across the 4 nations to develop effective domestic and international surveillance for variants of COVID-19 and be mindful of the risk of a late flu season.

3.6 COVID-19 pressures in the NHS was lower than previous waves, with 1,140 patients currently occupying hospital beds. Of these there were 531 confirmed cases. The number of incidental cases were increasing, with data suggesting that only 30% of patients required treatment for the virus. The number of COVID-19 related patients in intensive care had reduced to 13, but overall Units were very busy with 170 beds occupied. Furthermore, there were 750 more people in hospital than in the same period the previous year.

3.7 In view of the improving public health situation Cabinet considered whether it was proportionate to retain any or all of the remaining restrictions in law, rather than guidance and should the current expiry date of the Regulations, 25th February, be extended.

3.8 Ministers discussed whether the requirement for face coverings should be removed and concluded that this obligation should be removed for indoor public places from 28th February. However, given the need to continue to protect vulnerable people, the necessity for face coverings in retail, public transport and health related settings, where attendance was less discretionary, should remain in place until 28th March.

3.9 Cabinet noted the mandatory use of the Covid pass had been an important part of the government's response to coronavirus, but agreed it was no longer proportionate at this stage in the pandemic. Therefore, the requirement for venues to restrict entry to those with such passes should be removed from 18th February. Providing notice of the change would allow organisers the time to stand down resources, processes and infrastructure.

3.10 Ministers agreed that requiring the completion of specific risk assessments and reasonable measures, and retaining the associated powers of direction for Local Authorities in the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Functions of Local Authorities etc.) (Wales) Regulations 2020, were unlikely to remain proportionate in the current Coronavirus trajectory, particularly given other permanent legal duties and powers.

3.11 Therefore, the requirements for risk assessments and reasonable measures for regulated premises should be removed from 28 March.

3.12 In addition, the legal requirements on election campaigners should be removed from 28th March.

3.13 However, ministers agreed the self-isolation requirements should remain in place for now.

3.14 Given the overall position concerning case rates and hospitalisations, along with the gradual move to lifting protections, it was agreed that schools should plan to return to operating in line with the Local Infection Control Framework immediately after half term.

3.15 Cabinet agreed officials should proceed in line with the decisions taken by Ministers, while ensuring the announcements about future easing of protections contained the usual caveats relating to the public health conditions remaining favourable at that time.

Item 4: Second Supplementary Budget 2021-22

4.1 The Minister for Finance and Local Government introduced the paper, which asked Cabinet to agree the Second Supplementary Budget of 2021-22.

4.2 The Second Supplementary Budget regularised the final adjustments to budget allocations before the end of the financial year and set the limits, against which, outturn positions would be measured.

4.3 Over 150 individual allocations, totalling almost £2 billion, had been

approved from the reserve in order to support portfolios and maximise expenditure this financial year.

4.4 Therefore, there had been a number of decisions to utilise this funding including providing additional support to Local Government and a number of proposals that would deliver on Programme for Government commitments relating to public transport.

4.5 Furthermore, the UK government had recently announced additional funding to Local Authorities in England to enable them to deliver a £150 non-repayable rebate in Council Tax bills for all households in Bands A-D to help with rising energy costs. This announcement had resulted in additional funding to Wales of £175 million.

4.6 Some thought would be given on how best to use the additional funding to support people in Wales, including those not liable for Council Tax, and decisions would need to be taken that week.

4.7 The aim was to publish the budget on 15th February and move it in the Senedd on 15th March.

4.8 Cabinet welcomed the paper, particularly the additional allocations for the Education and Climate Change portfolios.

4.9 Cabinet approved the paper and put on record its thanks to all those involved in finalising the complex Supplementary Budget.

Item 5: Justice Transformation Programme stocktake

5.1 The First Minister invited the Minister for Social Justice and the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution to introduce the joint paper, which had been considered by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Justice the previous week.

5.2 It was noted the collaboration between portfolios on justice and wider social

justice issues, which were inextricably linked, was a key strength of the approach to this agenda. Key areas of interest included the positive news about the development of a Women's Residential Centre and the work on disaggregation of justice data, which would help build the case for the devolution of justice in Wales.

5.3 In addition, there was good progress on the Family Drug and Alcohol Courts pilot programme.

5.4 Cabinet recognised the value in progressing the Thomas Commission work across Government. Cabinet agreed to receive regular progress updates from the sub-committee.

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