



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MEETING

Cabinet meeting: 15 November 2021

Minutes of meeting of the Cabinet on 15 November 2021.

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Present

- Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS (Chair)
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Vaughan Gething MS
- Lesley Griffiths MS
- Jane Hutt 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

Apologies

- Julie James 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
- Madeleine Brindley, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser

- Daniel Butler, Special Adviser
- Ian Butler, Special Adviser
- David Davies, 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
- Chris Jones Deputy CMO
- Rob Orford, Chief Scientific Adviser Health
- Fliss Bennee, Co-Chair TAC
- Liz Lalley, Director Recovery
- Tom Smithson, Deputy Director COVID-19 Restart
- Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel
- Neil Buffin, Senior Lawyer
- Terry Kowal, Senior Legislative Counsel
- Andrew Jeffreys, Director Treasury
- Matt Wellington, Head of Budget Policy and Delivery

Item 1: Minutes of previous meetings

1.1 Cymeradwyodd y Cabinet gofnodion y 8 Tachwedd / Cabinet approved the

minutes of 8 November.

Item 2: Senedd business

2.1 Cabinet noted there had been changes to Plenary business that week. The statements on Second Homes and Affordability and The Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan had been postponed, as the Minister for Climate Change was unwell. Business on Tuesday was now expected to finish around 6:25pm and voting time on Wednesday was scheduled for 6:10pm.

Item 3: Review of Coronavirus Restrictions (No. 5) Regulations – 18 November 2021

3.1 The First Minister introduced the paper, which sought a steer on the current review period of the Coronavirus Restrictions (No. 5) Regulations.

3.2 Ministers were reminded that 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 paper outlined that overall cases of COVID-19 had fallen since the last review and the seven day average was around 490 in every 100,000 of the population, with the test positivity rate at 19.5% and the R rate at 0.92.

3.4 COVID-19 pressures on the NHS had stabilised. There were 805 suspected cases occupying hospital beds, of which 550 had been confirmed. 73 patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 were in ICU, which was 91 lower than

the record number of 164 during the height of the pandemic.

3.5 Given the general winter pressures, alongside the likelihood that resourcing and other respiratory viruses would again provide significant operational challenges for the NHS, Cabinet confirmed the objectives and principles for the specific coronavirus protections to ensure the legal requirements remained appropriate.

3.6 The objective was to maintain cases at manageable levels and not overwhelm the NHS. In doing so, Ministers would balance the 5 harms, including the impact on the economy, social society, well-being and mental health, along with long COVID. The role of strict protections, such as legal restrictions on meeting others, social contact and the closing of entire sectors, should remain linked directly to COVID-19 pressures on the NHS and not part of the normal public health toolkit.

3.7 As cases of COVID-19 had fallen across Wales, and the specific pressures on the NHS were at lower rates than previous waves, Cabinet agreed the current Alert Level 0 requirements should be maintained. Ministers also agreed the COVID pass should not be expanded to hospitality at this review. However, this would need to be considered further as part of the scenario planning exercise.

3.8 It was recognised there would be a need to re-visit the question of including the unvaccinated 16-17 year olds in the self-isolation requirements, once they had all had the offer of a second dose.

3.9 Cabinet approved the 3 recommendations within the paper.

Item 4: Welsh Government Budget: allocations and next steps

4.1 The Minister for Finance and Local Government introduced the paper, which asked Cabinet to agree the proposed approach and allocations for the 2022-23 Draft Budget. It contained 3 year spending plans, reflecting the outcome of the UK government's comprehensive spending review.

4.2 Cabinet was aware of the challenging settlement and the failure of the UK government to acknowledge its responsibilities while respecting devolution. There had been a lack of funding for coal tips and an unsatisfactory outcome on meeting border infrastructure costs. Alongside this were the implications of the levelling up agenda funding allocations bypassing Welsh Ministers.

4.3 Therefore the government faced some difficult choices. There was less funding overall and the front loaded profile meant that whilst significant allocations could be made in year 1, the subsequent years of the spending review period would see resources reduce considerably, resulting in challenges for the delivery of public services. The difficult capital settlement increased the challenges of recovery from the pandemic and achieving Net Zero.

4.4 The Budget would help protect NHS funding, to include COVID-19 costs with specific funding ring fenced for mental health. In addition, extra support for the Local Government Revenue Support Grant (RSG) would be provided, with specific funding for social care, thereby delivering the Government's commitment to protect these services.

4.5 Cabinet welcomed the allocations to meet the commitments to prioritise funding for Health, specifically mental health, Social Care and Local Government.

4.6 Ministers agreed that officials would need to develop a strong narrative to

support the Budget settlement, which clearly illustrated that decisions made by the UK government to underfund the Welsh Government would have significant implications for the delivery of public services.

4.7 Cabinet approved the paper.

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