



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MEETING

Cabinet meeting: 28 February 2022

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on 28 February 2022.

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Present

- Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS
- Rebecca Evans 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
- Lee Waters MS

Apologies

- Vaughan Gething 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
- Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
- Sara Faye, Special Adviser
- Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
- Owen John, 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
- Christopher Warner, Deputy Director COVID -19 Restart 21 Day Review
- Tom Smithson, Deputy Director COVID-19 Restart
- Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel
- Neil Buffin, Deputy Director Legal Services
- Jonathan Oates, Head of Clean Growth
- Megan Heap, Head of Emissions Trading Scheme and Carbon Pricing Policy
- Claire Bennett, Director Communities and Tackling Poverty
- Karen Cornish, Deputy Director Children and Families Division
- Nicola Edwards, Childcare, Play and Early Years Division

Item 1: Minutes of previous meetings

1.1 Cymeradwyodd y Cabinet gofnodion y 14 Chwefror / Cabinet approved the minutes of 14 February.

Item 2: Senedd business

2.1 Cabinet noted there had been a change to the Plenary grid since it had been circulated with the papers. The Llywydd had accepted an Emergency Question on the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Welsh citizens and businesses. The question had been scheduled for the start of Plenary on Tuesday, in advance of First Minister's questions. Voting time was scheduled for 7.20pm on Tuesday and around 5.55pm on Wednesday.

2.2 It was reported that there were now no limits on the number of Members allowed into the Siambr at any one time and the Llywydd had introduced a fixed seating plan, in line with arrangements before the pandemic.

2.3 Each group may implement its own policy on Siambr attendance.

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

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 3 March 2022.

3.2 Cabinet was 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 the public health context, which confirmed hospital and ICU pressures remained lower than previous waves. The latest data indicated there were 880 COVID-19 patients occupying hospital beds of which, 434 were confirmed cases. Current operational data stated only 24% of these people actively required treatment for the virus. There were 9 patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in critical care beds.

3.4 The advice of the CMO, included with the paper, outlined it was appropriate to continue the approach of cautious easing of the protections currently in place. However, there was a need to be mindful of the information from SAGE and NERVTAG suggesting future variants were highly likely and may lead to more significant levels of direct harm than seen with the Omicron variant.

3.5 Given the recommendations of the CMO, Cabinet confirmed the intent to remove the requirements for face coverings in all indoor public places from 28 March, providing conditions remained favourable. Until then, they still would be required for health and social care settings, all retail premises and public transport.

3.6 Ministers noted the current position in developing advisory non statutory public health guidance for employers that would support transition from the specifically focused statutory coronavirus risk assessments and reasonable measures. It was agreed, in the meantime, the current legal requirements remained necessary and proportionate.

3.7 It was reported that officials were considering the ongoing legal duty for positive cases and unvaccinated contacts in Wales to self-isolate, particularly given the SAGE advice about increased transmission risks resulting from the

removal of restrictions. Cabinet agreed it was proportionate for the current legal requirements for self-isolation to remain in place while this work was underway.

3.8 Cabinet noted that work was underway to complete the Transition Plan, which would communicate the change from the initial emergency phase of dealing with COVID-19 to a future of responding to coronavirus alongside many other infectious diseases. The final version of the plan would be presented to ministers at the 9am call on Thursday.

3.9 Cabinet agreed officials should proceed in line with the decisions taken by ministers and instruct lawyers accordingly.

Item 4: Expanding childcare support CAB(21-22)84

4.1 The Deputy Minister for Social Services introduced the paper, which asked Cabinet to agree in principle the next steps in delivering the vision of universal early childhood education and care provision.

4.2 It was important for the development of the individual child, to ensure they started school as prepared as possible to learn, develop and thrive, and to support parents into work and training to alleviate some of the financial pressures families were facing that were exacerbated by the cost of living crisis.

4.3 To deliver against the Programme for Government commitments, the level of investment in Flying Start would be increased to ensure vital services in communities were maintained. The Childcare Offer for 3-4 year olds would be expanded to include parents in education and training from September this year.

4.4 Furthermore, steps would be taken to gradually expand Flying Start so it would be universally available, starting with a small expansion of the programme

then opening up the childcare element to more 2-3 year olds in a phased way, which was in line with the Cooperation Agreement.

4.5 The progress had been made possible by recent budget allocations, however, this would not be sufficient to provide provision for all children immediately. Therefore, there would be a need to expand programmes gradually, over the current Senedd, scaling in line with budgets and with the capacity within the childcare, play and wider early years sectors. To support more children and families there would be a need for more settings, more places within existing settings and more staff to run them.

4.6 Cabinet welcomed the paper and recognised that the expansion of funded childcare would help tackle poverty.

4.7 Cabinet approved the paper.

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