

P-05-971 - Relax travel restrictions imposed by Covid-19 legislation to allow travel within Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 7 Gorffennaf 2020
Petitions Committee | 7 July 2020

Reference: RS20/12937-3

Introduction

Petition Number: P-05-971

Petition title: Relax travel restrictions imposed by Covid 19 legislation to allow travel within Wales

Text of petition: On 29th May the Welsh Government announced changes to the restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 regulations. Rules were relaxed but there is still a requirement for people to remain local. These rules prevent families who may live much further apart from meeting and prevent most residents enjoying exercise in the coast and countryside. There is no reason why social distancing cannot be more easily managed in the great outdoors. Restrictions have already been relaxed in England and N.Ireland.

Note – This briefing has been prepared prior to 6 July. The First Minister has indicated that the restrictions may be lifted on this date as outlined in the



following briefing. As such the restrictions may no longer be in force at the time of the Committee meeting.

1. Background

In light of the coronavirus pandemic, using its powers under the *Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984*, the Welsh Government made the *Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020*, (the 2020 regulations), which came into force on 26 March 2020.

The 2020 regulations have been amended several times since, and place a requirement on the Welsh Government to review the regulations every 21 days.

The latest amendments to the 2020 regulations came into force on 22 June 2020.

Initially, in March 2020, people in Wales were required to stay home, with the regulations only allowing people to leave home for a limited number of reasons.

These restrictions have been slightly eased since. On 29 May, at a review point for the regulations, the Welsh Government announced that the requirement to 'stay home' would be amended to 'stay local'.

At the time of preparing this brief, this requirement is still in place.

The Welsh Government has issued guidance on the requirement to stay local, which states:

...the law deliberately does not define "local" as it can mean different things in different circumstances. However, as a general rule, we consider anything within about five miles of your home to be local.

...there are certain activities, which are considered to be important enough to be exceptions to the requirement to stay local. In the regulations these are referred to as "reasonable excuses" to leave the local area.

The regulations say that these reasonable excuses are only available to you where it is "not reasonably practicable" to carry out the activity in your local area.

For example, those in rural areas would be permitted to travel slightly further to obtain supplies such as food and medicine if the nearest shops are slightly further away.

On 19 June 2020, the First Minister issued a statement setting out the changes made in the latest review of the 2020 regulations. In this statement, the First Minister announced that the Welsh Government [emphasis added]:

...will review the requirement to stay local, with a view to lifting it in two weeks' time on 6 July, if the conditions allow...A final decision will be based on the latest scientific and medical evidence and advice and how the virus is behaving in Wales.

Restrictions in other parts of the UK

Whilst in March 2020, when restrictions were initially put in place, there were very similar approaches taken across each part of the UK, over time differences have emerged. At the time of preparing this brief, the following restrictions are in place:

- In England and in Northern Ireland there are no limits on how far people are able to travel; and
- In Scotland, people should not travel more than around five miles for leisure or recreation. It is acceptable to travel outside the local area to meet members of another household in an outdoor space but people are asked to use their judgement about how far to travel. The Scottish Government has announced that the five mile rule will be removed on 3 July 2020.

2. Welsh Government and Welsh Parliament action

In his letter to the Chair, dated 16 June 2020, the First Minister sets out that the Welsh Government's reviews of the regulations:

...take account of a wide range of the evidence about the specific circumstances [in Wales]. A key purpose of the requirement to stay local is to prevent the spread of the virus between communities.

In the Senedd, the interpretation of the five mile limit has been discussed in Plenary. A written question has also been tabled asking for the Welsh Government to publish the scientific evidence that has been used to inform the rule. At the time of preparing this briefing as response has not been published.

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.