

## Government Response: The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 4) (Wales) Regulations 2020

Merit Scrutiny point 4:

The evidence for adopting a national approach included data, coupled with advice from the Chief Medical Officer, showing that COVID-19 infections in Wales are geographically widespread, with the majority of local authority (LA) areas experiencing increasing trends in confirmed case incidence and percentage of positive testing episodes for SARS-CoV2. Before the firebreak local restrictions were in place in 17 areas and the PHW data (seven day rolling figure 2-8 November) showed rising numbers of cases across the whole of Wales, not just confined to a limited number of Local Authorities.

The scientific evidence published by the Technical Advisory Cell (TAC), which was used to inform the firebreak, recommended:

*“...a two-phase approach is used. The first phase is a “fire-break” – a swift and short-term period of simple, extreme restrictions across the whole of Wales that would significantly reduce the prevalence of the virus in Wales.....The firebreak will have to reduce the national R (latest between 1.1 – 1.4) to below 0.9. This implies that R will need to be reduced in all areas of Wales, which requires a national approach rather than the current locally driven approach through Local Health Protection Areas (LPHAs)*

*The second phase is a new, simpler, national approach to behaviours and restrictions. Simpler messaging and regulations are expected to be easier to understand and comply with. Some existing restrictions may be removed if they are shown to be less effective or more harmful than originally expected, such as the Local Authority travel boundary restrictions. However, there would need to be sustainable changes in behaviour in many areas of life in order for Rt to remain as near to 1 as possible.”*

This report is available on the Welsh Government website:

[https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/technical-advisory-group-fire-breaks\\_2.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/technical-advisory-group-fire-breaks_2.pdf)

The decision to take a national approach was also informed by consultation with stakeholders and on evidence from focus groups. The message was that local restrictions were confusing and complicated and didn't correspond to people's lives as many do not live their life within a local authority boundary.

While we are unlikely to see the full impact of the firebreak until some weeks after it has ended, we are already seeing encouraging signs that the firebreak has broken chains of transmission leading to falling numbers of positive cases being reported. This is particularly clear in areas of high incidence such as Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil which are currently seeing significant falls the number of positive cases reported. Merthyr Tydfil also has the smallest population of any local authorities in Wales, so the rate per 100,000 can be skewed by smaller numbers of

cases. All areas will be closely monitored over the coming weeks. If there is a need to introduce targeted local action, there are a range of powers for local authorities and Incident Management Teams to respond to specific issues, as set out in the Coronavirus Control Plan.