

Rob Roberts MP
Member of Parliament for Delyn



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt. Hon Mark Drakeford MS
First Minister of Wales
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1AN

17th December 2020

Dear First Minister,

Re: Latest COVID restrictions

In these challenging times, nobody would envy the positions of the Prime Minister, First Ministers of the Devolved Administrations or their respective Health Ministers.

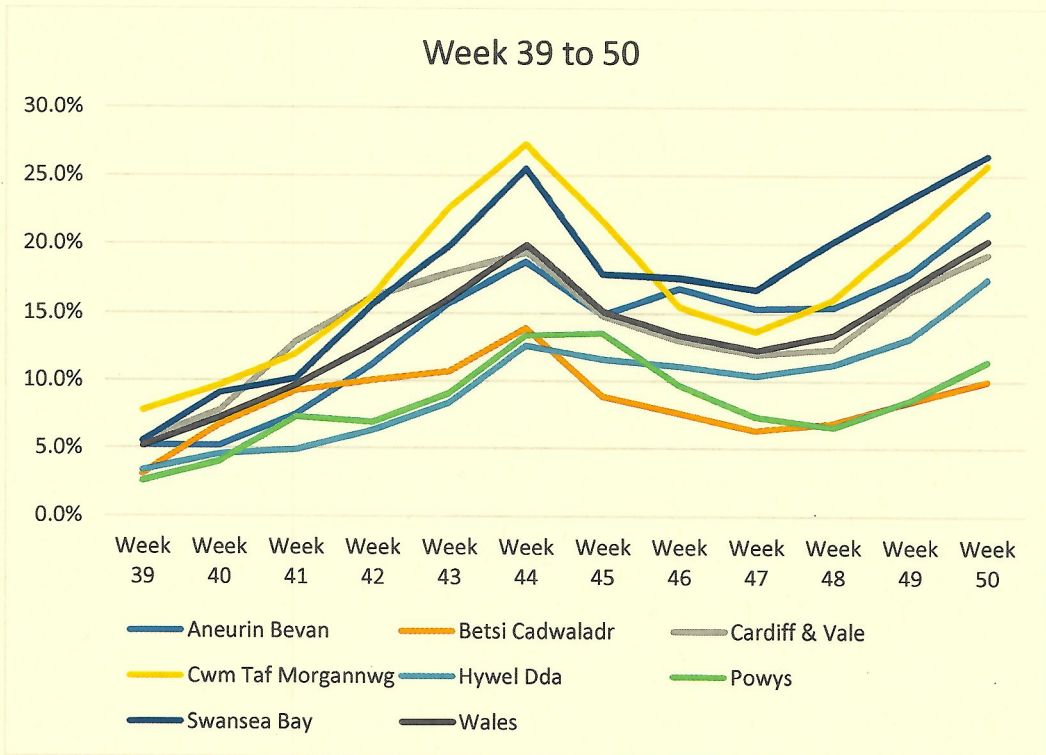
We, as signatories, were all elected to serve our constituents and we carry out that duty unapologetically. Our constituents look to us for assistance and guidance, and it is in the spirit of co-operatively trying to represent the views of our constituents that we write to you following the announcement yesterday (16th December) regarding a new “tier 4” lockdown which is coming to Wales on 28th December. We welcomed, as I’m sure you did, the correspondence from Simon Hart and Matt Hancock earlier this week regarding further collaborative efforts the UK Government is prepared to put in place for the benefit of the people of Wales.

The current feeling among many of our constituents is that the decisions being taken are disproportionate in many parts of Wales – the measures will have a devastating impact in several ways, and will ultimately prove futile, having caused needless societal and economic harm. In writing to you today we seek to be able to reassure our constituents that the Welsh Government is safeguarding lives and livelihoods and that the decisions being taken are not disproportionate, will not have a devastating impact on jobs and business and are not a futile effort.

Throughout this pandemic, we and our Welsh Conservative colleagues in the Senedd have asked repeatedly for evidence to justify the course you have chosen. We have yet to see any – indeed these requests have been met with obfuscation, diversion and delay.

We again feel compelled to ask for an explanation of several key elements of the current approach:

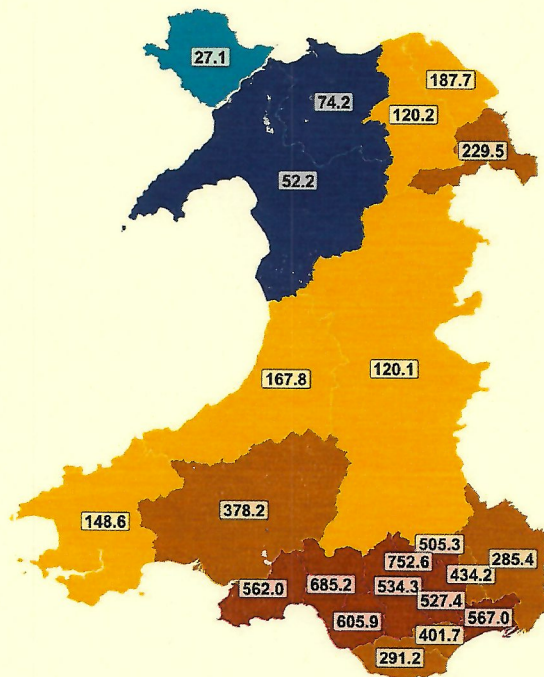
1. The infection rates across Wales are vastly different among regions. In Week 50 (ends 13th December) the positivity rate of tests on average across Wales was 20.2%. On Anglesey the positivity rate was 3.1%. Across the BCUHB area in total the rate was 10%, less than half of the Wales average. Conversely there are rates in excess of 25% and even 30% in some parts of south Wales. We agree that all parts are seeing an increase in numbers, as can be seen in the following graphics – it is the proportionality of the measures in treating all areas in the same way that we have questioned and continue to question and we would therefore like to see the evidence to justify. Please therefore can you outline the scientific advice and rationale given for treating all areas of Wales in the same manner.



Covid-19 case rates in Wales

Per 100,000 population - change over seven days

- <10
- 10 to 25
- 25 to 50
- 50 to 100
- 100 to 200
- 200 to 500
- 500+



Source: Public Health Wales, 16 December. Data up to 11 December





2. We recognise that some decisions are political judgements, so can you please provide an explanation for the decision to treat businesses in areas like parts of north west Wales, that have such a low positivity rate, the same as those in areas like the south east which have a much higher rate? Why are the 'Level 4' restrictions being applied indiscriminately across the whole of Wales?
3. We are all concerned about the rise in cases and death rates in Wales, which is the highest in the UK and the second highest in the whole of Europe. We are, however, confident that people will recognise the importance of following rules if they know they will be effective and proper explanation is given. Please therefore could you explain and justify the following measures:
 - a. the ban on non-essential shops opening, despite such shops remaining open even in the tier 3 areas of England – will supermarkets see aisles deemed non-essential cordoned off as before;
 - b. the ban on the sale of alcohol in pubs and restaurants and the 6pm closing time;
 - c. travel remains as it was previously, which means that (especially for those of us close to the England border) there will likely be a significant decamping over the border during the lockdown period as happened when the alcohol restriction in Wales was announced. This will take huge sums of money that would normally be spent in Wales out of our towns, cities and rural communities;
 - d. Retail outlets have spent significant time and resources on becoming "COVID-secure" over the past few months. Please provide evidence that retail outlets are responsible for, or contribute substantially to, the significant increases in case numbers;
 - e. gyms, leisure centres and close-contact services such as hairdressers will have to close, despite being able to remain open in all three tiers in England;
4. Can you please let us know why previous restrictions made in isolation from UK Government have not worked and why you expect these new restrictions to be effective, in particular why residents can have confidence we are not trapped in a cycle of lockdowns, with no prospect of relief? When do you expect the New Year lockdown to end?

As mentioned previously, we do not envy your position in having to make these challenging calls. We seek to ensure that a robust, reasoned and reasonable approach is taken to support the health and wellbeing of the people of Wales. The measures drawn up in Wales do not appear evidenced, proportionate or consistent even within our own borders – let alone the other parts of the UK where rates are lower, and the residents would appear to be safer. We are sure you would agree that it is proper that you should provide a compelling justification of these measures and we look forward to your early, detailed reply.

Yours Ever,

Rob Roberts, MP for Delyn

Robin Millar, MP for Aberconwy
Fay Jones, MP for Brecon and Radnorshire
Dr Jamie Wallis, MP for Bridgend
Simon Baynes, MP for Clwyd South
Rt Hon David Jones, MP for Clwyd West
Rt Hon Stephen Crabb, MP for Preseli Pembrokeshire
Dr James Davies, MP for Vale of Clwyd
Rt Hon Alun Cairns, MP for Vale of Glamorgan
Sarah Atherton, MP for Wrexham
Virginia Crosbie, MP for Ynys Môn