



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

RR/KS/MD

Mark Drakeford MS
First Minister
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

7th April 2021

Dear First Minister,

Re: Roadmap for a return of fans to spectator sports

Sports clubs are often at the heart of our local communities, providing fans an important space to not only watch their favourite team but also to socialise, keep fit and foster a positive community spirit. With many sports clubs not able to open during the pandemic, or having to play behind closed doors, the loss has been acutely felt by the whole community and many fans are desperate to return. With a highly successful Covid vaccination programme in Wales and one of the lowest Covid rates across the four nations, it is therefore imperative that the Welsh Government now set out a clear roadmap indicating when and how fans can return to spectator sport – just has been done in England.

As the sports industry is a key sector in Wales, providing important social benefits to fans as well as significantly contributing to the nation's economy and job creation efforts, a roadmap setting out the dates to reopen and resume should not just be limited to the retail and hospitality industries. In England, clubs and fans already have this certainty with a partial return of fans beginning from the 17th May, before larger sporting events with fans being allowed to take place from the 21st June. With sports fans in Wales absent from events and matches for over a year, and fans starting to return to sports over the border, it is now time to support a safe and phased return of fans in Wales. If not, both clubs and fans in Wales will be placed in further jeopardy and will suffer from a lack of clarity and direction.

Most importantly, it is the right, and safest, time to now prepare for a phased return of fans to sports, such as football and rugby. With nearly half of the population in Wales having received the first Covid-19 vaccination, the majority of fans will no longer be at high risk and will have some protection against Coronavirus. The case rate in Wales also continues to fall, with Wales having the lowest Covid rate of the UK nations, highlighting that we are ready to start to return to a more normal way of life, including in sport. Crucially, with recent studies from Ireland showing that outdoor transmission accounts for just 0.1% of cases, there is now no valid reason why fans should not be able to return to sports like football, which is largely outdoors, as soon as possible.



While it is right the return of fans to sports is done safely, if fans are not allowed to return soon, the risk of bankruptcy and closure for many sports clubs is very real and pressing. Many clubs, especially smaller ones such as Flint Town United FC, rely on fan revenue to survive and remain profitable. As fans have not attended matches or events for over a year, sports clubs have suffered huge financial losses and are now in dire need of support – whether that be from fans returning or further government funding. Consequently, a clear and specific roadmap for fans' returning would be the light at the end of the tunnel for many clubs, following an incredibly challenging year. Without a roadmap, and the financial security it brings, the future of Welsh sports is at risk.

Throughout the pandemic, Welsh sports has consistently been left behind and let down, compared to sports in the other UK nations. While the promise of pilot events with up to 1000 fans is a welcome first step in bringing fans back in Wales, it is still disappointing that no further dates have been announced allowing for a more substantial return of fans. Moreover, vague statements from the Welsh Government commenting that fans may be allowed to return in time 'for this summer' or that sports stadiums may reopen 'in some form by the end of 2021' is simply not good enough and will create further uncertainty and confusion amongst fans and clubs alike.

Welsh sports has entertained us and provided so many memorable moments during this pandemic, including most recently with Wales' winning the Six Nations. With the current Covid situation in Wales making a return of fans as safe as possible, it is time to repay our sports clubs and fans in Wales. Therefore, I strongly urge the Welsh Government to reconsider their position and set out a clear roadmap which details how and when sports fans can return in order to give sports clubs in Wales the same chance as those in England to thrive and succeed.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Roberts', written over a horizontal line.

Rob Roberts MP
Member of Parliament
Delyn

CC: Rt Hon. The Lord Elis-Thomas PC MS, Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism