



Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair
Petitions Committee
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Dear Chair

I am writing in response to your letter of 5 January about the petition calling for the Welsh Government to stop all lockdowns.

In Wales – just as in the rest of the world – the past year has been dominated by the coronavirus pandemic. A great many people have become ill and, very sadly, more than 7,000 people in Wales have died from this terrible virus.

On 14 December, we published our updated *Coronavirus Control Plan*. The plan sets out four alert levels, which are aligned to the level of risk and outlines the measures needed at each level to control the spread of the virus and protect people's health. We have drawn on the expertise of the UK Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies and our Technical Advisory Group, to identify the interventions, which work and what we have learned during the pandemic.

Wales has been at alert level four – the highest level of restrictions – since 20 December. This has meant people are required to stay at home. Non-essential retail, close contact services, gyms and leisure centres, hospitality and accommodation have been closed.

Although these restrictions on people and businesses across Wales have been challenging, thanks to everyone's efforts we are seeing steady and encouraging falls in coronavirus cases across Wales.

The law requires that restrictions in Wales are reviewed every 21 days to ensure they remain proportionate and effective. We have started to take the first steps towards relaxing restrictions – Foundation Phase pupils returned to school this week (week commencing 22 February). If the public health situation continues to improve, we hope to get more children back into school ahead before the Easter break.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

At the last three-week review of the restrictions, I said the Welsh Government would be considering whether stay-at-home could be lifted at the next review in the week of 8 March. If this is the case, we will also consider options to start to reopen non-essential retail and close contact services.

This is set out in my written statement at: <https://gov.wales/written-statement-review-health-protection-coronavirus-restriction-no5-wales-regulations-2020-1>

We have also published a further update to the *Coronavirus Control Plan*, which takes account of the impact of vaccination on the pandemic and the emergence of the new variant strains of the virus. This is available at: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-control-plan-alert-levels-wales-coming-out-lockdown>

We can all be proud of the excellent progress of the vaccination programme in Wales. This brings with it the promise of a brighter future, but there is still a long way to go. Restrictions remain necessary to prevent the spread of the virus and keep Wales safe.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD