

Hospitality lockdown in Dublin not reducing level of infections

Non food pubs in Dublin continue to be only pubs not allowed to open in country

Will have been closed for minimum of 225 days

The Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) has said that the decision to close the hospitality sector in Dublin has not made a difference in reducing the levels of infection. Most pubs and restaurants across the capital were forced to close on the 18th September, following the Government's decision to ban indoor service.

In the 18 days since their forced closure, the level of infection in Dublin continued to grow. This was despite NPHEt claims that the infections were arising in pubs and restaurants, a claim they have failed to produce data to justify.

The non food pubs in Dublin, approximately 250 pubs across the capital, will have had their doors closed by order of the Government for a minimum of 225 consecutive days. The Government's announcement that the entire country will be placed in Level 3 also means that Dublin's non food pubs are now facing their sixth potential reopening date, following the proposed reopenings for 20th July, 10th August, 31st August, 21st September and 10th October.

While the pubs that serve food in Dublin will have had their doors closed by the Government for 144 days since 15th March.

Despite the Government advocating a "living with Covid-19" approach, they have repeatedly singled out the hospitality sector to bear the brunt of restrictions without providing meaningful supports to ensure businesses and jobs that were viable pre lockdown will remain so.

A further sign of the inconsistent approach being taken to the hospitality sector is that the non food pubs are allowed to offer outdoor service in every county except Dublin.

The LVA is calling on the Government to address that support deficit in the coming Budget. The LVA is seeking:

- Restoration of the former Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme level support for the hospitality sector.
- Abolition of commercial rates for year from October 2020 to September 2021.
- Re-introduce VAT 9% on pub food.
- Cut excise by 15%.
- Increased cash grant aid to reflect the extended pub closures (10% of Restart Grant Plus per week closed).

"The Government and NPHEt's big idea for reducing the level of infections in Dublin was to keep the pubs and restaurants closed – and that hasn't worked," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "Yet despite that lack of progress they are taking the same approach around the country and extending these short-sighted measures in Dublin. They expect pubs and restaurants to take blow after blow while all other aspects of society can continue to go about their business. This is disproportionate and tokenistic. It amounts to being seen to take action and merely punishing easy targets.

"How can they justify allowing the non food pubs to offer outdoor service in every county apart from Dublin? This makes no sense and it is easy to see why the faith in the Government and NPHEt has been shattered amongst most of the pub sector in this country.

"It is worth remembering that one third of the pubs in Dublin have not been able to open their doors since mid March. They will be closed for a minimum of 225 days at this point, have made zero contribution to this

problem and they have to remain closed. This is not allowing these pubs and their employees to live with Covid.

"There is now a massive level of responsibility on the Government to bring forward real and meaningful support measures in the Budget, particularly for the pub sector. We already had one very false dawn when it comes to the Government providing support when we got spin and little substance. How to survive this pandemic is increasingly taking on different meanings for different sectors and the pubs are at the forefront of that varying approach given the way we have been treated since the outset," Mr. O'Keefe concluded.