

Hospitality should begin reopening in 6 weeks – LVA

First step should include outdoor service for all types of hospitality venues in late May

Indoor service should follow shortly afterwards for all pubs and restaurants when hotels reopen in June

Any long delay between NI and ROI will see thousands travel across the Border weekly to enjoy hospitality

Following the publication of Northern Ireland's reopening plan, the Government should announce plans for the reopening of hospitality, beginning in six weeks' time with outdoor service for all venues, according to the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA). This should be followed by a return to indoor service for all pubs and restaurants shortly afterwards, aligned with the reopening of hotels across the country.

The LVA made their comments as it was announced Northern Ireland would be allowing all hospitality to reopen for outdoor service later this month from 30th April, while indoor service is due to resume for all hospitality in England from 17th May and in Northern Ireland from 24th May.

With NPHET outlining the need for social contact to remain largely unchanged over the next six weeks, the LVA has said that once that period has elapsed hospitality should begin reopening, starting with outdoor service for all venues – including all pubs and restaurants. This would be from the week beginning 24th May.

The LVA believes that any long delay between the reopening of hospitality in the North and in the Republic will lead to thousands of people making the journey across the Border every weekend.

Northern Ireland's reopening announcement comes on the same day that traditional pubs in Dublin marked 13 consecutive months of closure by order of the Government. The Republic of Ireland already has the most severe hospitality closure in the European Union, with most pubs and restaurants across the country being forced to keep their doors shut for 9 of the last 13 months.

With the Taoiseach confirming hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs will be allowed to reopen in June, the LVA says the reopening of all indoor service should be aligned with that date, given the risk profile for eating and drinking in these venues is the same as in any other form of hospitality.

"Following the publication of the reopening plan in Northern Ireland, the Government should now set out a plan for reopening hospitality in the Republic beginning in six weeks' time," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "The reopening should start with outdoor service for all hospitality, which includes traditional pubs, gastropubs and restaurants and with capacity dictated by social distancing. That timeframe would allow for the further rollout of the vaccine and would also ensure that NPHET's request for social contact to remain unchanged for the next six weeks is met.

"Any plan should also allow for indoor drinking and dining to resume in all hospitality venues shortly after that point, aligned with the reopening of hotels in June. The risk profile for dining indoors and drinking in hotels, guesthouses or B&Bs is the same as it is for other hospitality venues so these should all open together. We will not accept any situation which sees the Government discriminating against certain sections of hospitality over others.

"The Government has re-confirmed that by the end of June more than 80% of the population will have received their first dose of the vaccine, so infection rates should have significantly diminished and the 'vaccine bonus' should allow for all indoor hospitality activity to resume.

"The tens of thousands of people working in pubs and across the Irish hospitality sector are understandably keen to get back to work and to return to some sense of normality. It has been a very, very

long time coming. Hospitality can't be kept closed indefinitely and we believe this is a reasonable approach towards reopening while also being mindful of public health," Mr. O'Keeffe concluded.