

Indoor hospitality to reopen within next two weeks – LVA

LVA is fully engaged with Government Hospitality Working Group to Highlight Trade's Concerns

The Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) has said that they are pleased that pubs and hospitality businesses will be able to reopen within the next two weeks. The Government has confirmed that indoor hospitality will resume no later than 26th July.

However the LVA has again reiterated they have significant concerns around the new system that is to be implemented. The LVA believes the new measures are discriminatory, will lead to flashpoints between hospitality staff and potential customers and there remain major question marks how it will be enforced and how hospitality businesses will demonstrate compliance.

The details around the phasing of the new system will also need to be clarified with the Government suggesting that matters like hospitality businesses using an app to verify QR codes and the use of antigen testing will follow at a later date.

The LVA believes they have no option but to go along with the new measures as the Government has made it clear the only alternative will be to keep pubs and hospitality businesses closed for indoor service until September or October at the earliest. By 26th July some pubs will be required to keep their doors shut for 496 consecutive days.

The LVA has also said that the issue of affordable ventilation for the hospitality sector should also be considered to improve public safety in indoor settings and to prevent future closures across the sector.

The LVA remains fully engaged with the Government Hospitality Working Group to highlight the issues for the trade with the Government's approach and to press Government for clear and workable solutions.

"We don't like this plan," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "However it has been made explicitly clear to us that our options amount to either staying closed until at least September or October or go along with a deeply flawed system. Pubs and hospitality businesses want to get open and based on what we've been told by Government this seems to be the only circumstances under which that will be permitted to happen. In this situation we don't really feel like there is an alternative for our sector.

"After the latest meeting of the working group our concerns remain. We believe the system is discriminatory and is going to lead to flashpoints as hospitality staff try to verify whether potential customers have been vaccinated or not. Our members are already reporting there is real anger about this issue from customers. We are also quite worried about how this system is going to be policed for both customers and the businesses themselves.

"We have continually made it clear to our members that all guidelines must be followed for the good of public health and that will remain the case. However, there are still serious questions about how this approach will operate in practice and time is pressing.

"We also believe that the Government must now clearly tackle and define the issue of affordable ventilation for indoor settings once and for all. This is an airborne virus so it stands to reason that solutions will ultimately need to include some measures in this area which will improve public safety and prevent future closures across our sector. Some experts have suggested that there are affordable measures available and if that is the case this is something that should be utilised.

"Critically, we sought clarification on the public health guidelines that will apply given that all indoor customers will be vaccinated. We also need to know the detail of the further phasing of the reopening of the pub sector as the vaccine rollout advances," Mr O'Keeffe concluded.