

LVA and VFI seeking urgent meeting with Government

Pub representatives will put forward a series of radical proposals to maintain public health compliance

The Licensed Vintners' Association (LVA) and the Vintners' Federation of Ireland (VFI) have written to the Government accepting their invitation to discuss the Government Roadmap and its implications for pubs as a matter of urgency. This follows commitments made by Ministers over the weekend that the Government will meet with the two representative bodies for publicans over course of the coming week.

As part of their discussions with the Government, the two organisations will be pressing for pubs to reopen at the same time and on the same basis as cafes and restaurants. Recognising the challenge of maintaining social distancing in a hospitality environment, the organisations will also be putting forward radical changes to the normal operations of bars in order to protect public health.

These measures include:

- Bars will become dispense bars only with no sitting, standing, ordering, payment or drinking at the bar allowed.
- Table service will be a requirement with pubs only serving customers seated at tables.
- The numbers on the premises would be confined to no more than 4 per every 10 square metres.
- A maximum of 6 people would be permitted at any one table.
- Customers will be required to use hand sanitiser upon entry.
- All customers must remain seated.
- Staff will be fully trained in the new procedures. They will also be asked to maintain a safe distance from customers when taking orders and to wash their hands thoroughly every 30 minutes.
- The utilisation of outdoor spaces to enhance social distancing.
- Procedures implemented to ensure safe use of toilet facilities, which may include limits on the numbers using toilets at any one time.
- No live music or DJs.
- Gardaí / HSE will have the power to close any business who is flouting the public health guidelines.

The two organisations will also stress they remain fully committed to doing what is necessary to protect the health and safety of all staff and customers.

Strict protocols setting out how staff and customers are required to comply with social distancing in hospitality businesses will be developed in conjunction with National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) and the Department of Health. Those protocols would apply to all hospitality businesses. The publican groups would look to have the temporary measures reviewed by NPHET on an ongoing basis, with a view to resuming normal trading when it is safe to do so.

Speaking about the proposed measures, Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA said, "We fully respect the need to continue to protect the public health. We have repeatedly proven this commitment, not least in the fact that our sector was the first to close across the country. We also believe that if other venues who serve food and alcohol are allowed to reopen in Phase 3, then pubs should be granted the same opportunity to trade. We don't believe it is in any way appropriate that the Government should apply one rule for some hospitality businesses and another rule for others.

"We are making a series of radical proposals to how bars should operate for the reopening scenario. Trading will be extremely difficult under these circumstances. There is no doubt that the pub experience as we know it will have to change dramatically. Many pubs may choose not to reopen as it simply won't be financially viable under these conditions. However, for those who want to trade, these measures will have the essential impact of protecting the health and wellbeing of staff and customers alike," Mr. O'Keeffe said.

Padraig Cribben, Chief Executive of the VFI said, "We were pleased to see Minister Humphreys and Minister Harris commit to organising a meeting this week to discuss the reopening of pubs in line with restaurants and cafés. We have now written to the Government to ensure this meeting happens at the earliest possible opportunity. What is clear is that the current roadmap plan isn't tenable and will lead to confusion in the hospitality sector if it is not addressed.

"The public health restrictions will present real challenges to all hospitality venues, it doesn't matter if they are a pub, a restaurant, a café or a hotel. There is no denying that and there is no getting around it. Addressing those public health requirements will be necessary for all hospitality businesses whenever they reopen. Pubs across Ireland are up to that challenge and will do what is required for maintaining a safe and healthy place of business," Mr. Cribben concluded.