Supports and longer term solutions now required – LVA

The Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) has called on the Government to immediately reintroduce Covid supports for the late night sector and also develop practical longer term solutions for hospitality. This follows the news that the Government is to reimpose restrictions on the late night industry with all hospitality venues now required to trade no later than midnight from Thursday.

The LVA has said this will be extraordinarily difficult for those working in late bars, nightclubs and the rest of the late night sector and will place considerable pressures on livelihoods in the run up to Christmas. It also places a question mark on the longer term viability of the late night industry until such time as a practical longer term solutions are developed that allow businesses to trade while the pandemic persists.

In relation to supports the LVA said it was essential that the various measures such as the CRSS, EWSS and PUP were reimplemented immediately in full for the late night sector and anyone who will be impacted by these latest restrictions, along with the waiving of commercial rates for as long as the restrictions remain in place.

“Effectively this latest announcement means that the current Government strategy isn’t working,” said Donall O’Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. “We were told that if we waited until the majority of the public was vaccinated we would be able to get back to trading. Well we waited and that wasn’t enough.

“Like the rest of the country, of course we are conscious of the worsening health situation. But this will still be really hard news for those working in the sector to take. Late night hospitality was closed for 585 consecutive days, got to open for 27 days and now they face another indefinite period of closure. It also needs to be acknowledged that every time the Government flicks the switch on restrictions there are consequences for people’s livelihoods and the businesses that sustain those livelihoods. We will have enormous difficulty retaining our staff after this latest decision.

“This latest reimposition of restrictions casts significant doubt about the viability of the late night sector for as long as the pandemic persists. When will we be in a position to allow that sector to reopen and trade again? Will we have to go through this whole process again and again? What is to stop this cycle from repeating itself next year?

“What seems clear is that more nuanced, longer term, practical solutions are now needed. Solutions that will enable environments that are regarded as ‘high risk’ to operate safely. For example perhaps now the Government needs to start examining affordable ventilation schemes for the industry?

“In the short term it is critical that the Government immediately outlines the reintroduction of the full level of supports for the people who will once again find themselves out of work and for the businesses who employ them. That is the absolute minimum required and is the essential first step before our sector can begin a bigger conversation about what co-existing with this pandemic really means,” Mr. O’Keeffe concluded.