



# Campaign for Pubs

Promote, Support and Protect Pubs

Kate Forbes MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy  
Scottish Government  
St. Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

28<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Dear Kate,

## **Table Service in Pubs and Bars**

We are writing to urge you to remove the requirement for table service in hospitality, which is causing a very significant problem for many pubs and bars, especially smaller pubs and bars in Scotland and those run by independent publicans.

As the vaccination programme progresses and hospitalisations remain at a low level, it seems a good time to properly (and urgently) review this mandatory requirement, which increases staff costs and makes it difficult or impossible for some pubs and bars to operate viably.

Given all the other measures in place in hospitality it would seem reasonable to allow customers to order and pay at the bar. This is acceptable in cafes, supermarkets and a host of other settings, many of which are much less strictly regulated than hospitality. In a hospitality setting this could be easily managed with masks, screens and queueing systems and would pose no more risk than a member of staff going from table to table taking orders and payments and delivering drinks. Customers need to get up to use the toilets and it seems ridiculous that they can't take a drink back to their seat when they are walking past the bar.

This measure is particularly onerous in wet sales pubs which are set up and staffed in order to allow customers to order and pay at the bar. The use of table service in these settings means that delivering a drink to a customer takes three times longer than it used to. Consequently more staff are required to serve fewer customers. Social distancing which vastly reduces capacity means that premises are not making enough money to employ more staff and are left stuck between a rock and a hard place. In addition, if more staff were to be employed we have no idea how long table service will be required for therefore no idea how long they will be needed for. Not an attractive employment proposition for anyone.

In reality what is happening is that both business owners and staff are running themselves into the ground trying to manage with an unnecessary burden on their businesses as nobody can afford more staff. After no money coming in for months apart from small grants which did not even cover ongoing costs, nobody has any extra money to spend. Now that businesses are open the very best they can hope for is to break even and if they are to survive simply cannot afford increased expenditure. This is not viable going forward and is physically and emotionally draining which is bound to have a detrimental effect on health in the long term. This is clearly not being understood or appreciated by the Scottish Government and we urge you to listen as many Scottish publicans are exhausted and struggling trying to manage and stay afloat.

Another issue with table service is that as customers are no longer able to come to the bar it is very difficult for staff to judge how much a customer has had to drink. Those few minutes of interaction at the bar are vital in being able to judge whether it is time to offer a taxi home or not. This is a cornerstone of a responsibly managed pub. Taking that away removes the opportunity to manage situations before they become a problem.

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In addition, many places are simply not doing, it creating a very uneven playing field. I can understand why they have chosen to ignore the guidelines in this respect and am sure that their premises are still safe and well managed. However, for those that are still observing the guidance it is making life very difficult. It would surely be much simpler to remove it from the guidance for everyone and to give pubs and bars the same rules as cafes and allow us to properly manage this in the same way those businesses do.

It would be a small thing to remove which would make a massive difference to so many businesses and allow them to remain viable going forward. At the very least some sort of timescale for removal would be extremely useful in financial planning and consideration of staffing levels for what I hope will be a busy summer.

We look forward to your response and to engaging with the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely,



Morag Douglas  
Campaign for Pubs Spokesperson for Scotland  
Licensee, The Star, Burntisland



Greg Mulholland  
Campaign Director, Campaign for Pubs

cc John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery  
Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance  
Anas Sarwar MSP, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party  
Douglas Ross MSP MP, Leader of the Scottish Conservatives  
Patrick Harvie MSP and Lorna Slater MSP, Co-Leaders of the Scottish Greens  
Willie Rennie MSP, Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats  
Neil Bibby MSP  
The Scottish Licensed Trade Association