

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1848](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Paul Marinello

**Subject:** Allow snooker and pool venues to open in more tiers

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to allow snooker and pool venues to open at all levels of the five-tier system of coronavirus restrictions, except tier 4.

### Background

The objective of [Scotland's Strategic Framework](#) is to set out a sustainable response to the pandemic to be implemented until either a vaccine or highly effective treatments to the virus are developed.

The Strategic Framework includes measures across a wide number of settings and provides a comprehensive approach to reducing infection rates and suppressing the spread of the virus. Each of the five levels is designed to reflect the relative severity of infection rates within areas with progressively heightened restrictions implemented as necessary. The key measures relating to Snooker/Pool Halls and indoor bowling alleys are set out in the table below:

Leisure and Entertainment Activity Measures (socialising rules apply)	Level 0 (Baseline)	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Snooker/Pool Halls and indoor bowling alleys	Open	Open	Closed	Closed	Closed

According to Scotland's Strategic Framework: [Business Closures Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment \(BRIA\)](#) in relation to snooker/pool halls the purpose and intended effect of the legislation is:

“Snooker/Pool Halls and indoor bowling alleys are an important part of Scotland's economy and society. Snooker and pool halls tend to either be independent businesses, part of a larger leisure facility, within licensed premises, holiday parks or hotels. Indoor Bowling alleys often form part of wider retail and shopping centres.

As well as an economic contribution, snooker/pool halls and indoor bowling alleys provide important settings for friends and families to socialise, reducing the risk of isolation and loneliness and improving mental wellbeing. This will be particularly important as we enter the winter months. There are facilities across the country, providing

services to their communities. Snooker, Billiards and pool are more popular amongst the most deprived 20% of communities in Scotland than in other areas. We do not have similar analysis for those who visit indoor bowling alleys.

High-risk factors associated with transmission of the virus include indoor spaces such as a snooker/pool hall or indoor bowling alley, where good ventilation and physical distancing may be less easy to maintain. These are also places where people come together to spend prolonged periods of time (more than 15 minutes) in close proximity, enabling the virus to spread easily from person to person. Another risk factor is the when a 2m distance cannot be maintained, as evidence suggests that 1m distancing carries between 2 and 10 times the risk of 2m distancing<sup>93</sup>. Pinch points (at areas such as toilets) all contribute to risk. Keeping surfaces clean and regulating movement throughout the setting is a further challenge and there are risks around the common use of equipment and surfaces such as bowling balls, snooker cues, balls and tables.

Snooker/Pool halls often have poor/ inadequate ventilation (e.g. for example many have no natural light and any windows are likely to be covered by heavy curtains or blacked out, limiting ventilation). There will often be a licensed bar ancillary to the hall, and there may be limited eating or restaurant facilities. Bars will be subjected to separate measures under the strategic framework.

Fundamentally, venues which are attended by many people, typically from different households, specifically to meet for long periods of time, all amplify the risk of transmission. Snooker/pool halls and indoor bowling alleys are amongst these higher risk venues and consequently, while recognising the disadvantages of restrictions on these facilities, careful consideration of these inherent risks are necessary when considering whether to apply restrictions at various levels within the Framework.

Snooker/Pool Halls and indoor bowling alleys were closed in March 2020 when restrictions were initially applied. They were able to reopen in the summer as restrictions were eased but then closed again in the Central Belt as a result of the increased restrictions for that area in October 2020. Since November 2, these facilities have been closed in Level 2-4 areas but have been able to reopen in Level 0 and 1 areas.”

The status of snooker and pool halls is further emphasised in the Scottish Government’s [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): businesses and workplaces that must close and can remain open at protection level 4](#) guidance. This states that snooker and pool halls (under the category of entertainment and leisure venues) must close under level 4.

The [Scottish Government's Tourism and Hospitality Sector Guidance](#) provides the following instructions in relation to snooker and pool activities.

*“Q. Can hospitality premises in Levels 0-1 still offer pool, darts and gaming machines?”*

A. Yes, these services can still be offered at Levels 0-1 but must be managed within the current guidelines i.e. face coverings, enhanced hygiene, physical distancing, no crowding or encroaching on thoroughfares and no food or drink may be consumed when not seated at a table. Where any of these conditions cannot be met then these services should be withdrawn.

*Q. Can hospitality premises in Levels 2-3 still offer pool, darts and gaming machines?”*

A. As previously, the operability of pool and gaming machines is linked to the status of related premises where these services are a primary activity i.e. pool/snooker halls and amusement arcades. Therefore:

Level 2 – amusement arcades open – gaming machines permitted in hospitality (subject to risk assessment and robust hygiene arrangements)

Level 2 – snooker/pool halls closed – pool in hospitality not permitted

Level 3 – amusement arcades-snooker/pool halls closed – gaming machines and pool not permitted in hospitality

Due to the need to keep customers seated for non-essential purposes in hospitality, premises should refrain from offering darts in levels 2-3.”

The [Business Closures Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment \(BRIA\)](#) in relation to snooker/pool halls states the Scottish Government did not conduct any business or public consultation on the measures relating to snooker/pool halls and indoor bowling alleys. The urgent nature of implementation timescales precluded this.

The ‘Scottish Firms Impact Test’ within the [Business Closures Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment \(BRIA\)](#) in relation to snooker/pool halls states the Scottish Government recognise the strain that restrictions place on the sector. Where facilities have to be closed this may affect the viability of the business with a consequent effect on staff, employers and the wider economy.

There is a package of financial support from the UK Government and the Scottish Government for businesses to mitigate the negative impacts of the restrictions, particularly for businesses required by law to close to the public or significantly modify their operations.

Business required to close by law or to significantly change its operations due to COVID-19 restrictions from 2 November 2020 might be eligible for the [Strategic Framework Business Fund](#) (SFBF).

Businesses can apply for a:

- temporary closure grant - £2,000 or £3,000 (depending on rateable value) if your business is required to close by law
- business restrictions grant - £1,400 or £2,100 (depending on rateable value) if your business can remain open but is specifically required to modify its operations by law, for example having to close earlier than normal or demand for your products or services has been reduced because of the pandemic.

Grants will be paid every four weeks in arrears as long as restrictions last.

Also available is the UK Government [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) whereby employees working for businesses will receive 80% of their salary paid for by government.

The UK Government also has [support for the self-employed](#) who will also receive 80% of their average trading profits for November to January, with a further, as yet unspecified, grant to follow covering February to April.

The [UK Government has also announced](#) (2 November):

- An extension of the coronavirus business interruption loan schemes until the end of January.
- An extension of mortgage and consumer credit payment holidays, lasting 6 months.

## **Scottish Government Action**

The [Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) \(Restrictions and Requirements\) \(Local Levels\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2020](#) implemented the Strategic Framework regulations outlined above and were published on 30th October and came into force on 2 November. These Regulations were amended before they came into force by the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) \(Restrictions and Requirements\) \(Local Levels\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2020](#).

## **Scottish Parliament Action**

A number of the Scottish Parliament's Committees are undertaking inquiries on the impact of COVID-19. The focus of this Petition on allowing snooker and pool venues to open in more tiers is relevant to the following committees.

- Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee has had an ongoing [inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's economy, including businesses and workers](#). The Committee has taken written and oral evidence from a variety of sectors on the impact of COVID-19 guidance and restrictions on businesses.
- The Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee had had an ongoing inquiry on the [impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's Culture](#)

[and Tourism Sectors](#). Hospitality businesses have featured regularly in the tourism aspects of this scrutiny.

**Alison O'Connor**  
**Senior Analyst**  
15/12/2020

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