

**PE1831/A**

Scottish Government submission of 13 November 2020

I would like to provide the following information to the Committee in relation the above petition.

On 14 August it was confirmed that, as a precautionary step, hospitality premises should stop the playing of low level background sound, including music and audio from other devices such as TVs. This measure is separate from restrictions on live music and higher volume events, which carry a different risk profile.

The role of aerosols and droplets in the transmission of viruses is a well understood area of science. There is a likely increased occurrence of aerosols and droplets in environments where acoustic conditions may lead people to raise their voice and or lean-in to be heard. In such an environment this presents a higher risk in the current context of virus containment and the requirement for people to keep physically distanced.

It was therefore decided that until more was known about the impact of background sound on behaviours and speech intelligibility, COVID-19 itself, and how hospitality premises were adapting to additional mitigating measures and statutory guidance (almost published on 14 August) a cautious approach was necessary to mitigate possible risks that may arise. As with all measures, the First Minister indicated at the time that the issue would be kept under review.

Following introduction an expert advisory group was established to look at the key concepts and issues around safe management of low level background sound in hospitality. This work, involving acoustic experts, industry representatives and local authority environmental health officials, continued until mid-September and produced initial findings and proposals for the development of guidance.

However, over the autumn, Scotland, and indeed the rest of the UK, much of Europe and other parts of the world, have experienced rising infection rates. This has required a redoubling of effort from government and key public services, as well as all of society, to address the public health emergency. It was therefore necessary to pause the advisory group work in the interim.

On 27 October, following publication of Scotland's Strategic Framework, the First Minister confirmed that the issue of low level background sound in hospitality would be looked at again by the expert advisory group. This work has commenced and the group is taking forward the task of looking at how guidance can be developed for the sector for safe management of low level background sound. This work is ongoing and further updates will be provided by Scottish Government in due course.

I hope the above provides sufficient background on the subject of petition PE1831.