

P-05-981 Allow gyms and leisure centres to reopen, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 07.07.20

P-05-981 Pwyllgor Deisebau 17.07.20 / Petitions Committee 17.07.20

Whilst I appreciate that the provision for one to one coaching and personal training is allowed if it takes place outdoors, this only covers a small amount of the population who have the privilege of being able to train in this kind of way. Whilst I also understand the risk of the virus and transmission is not 100% understood, or transmission being risk free in any environment, it doesn't appear to be logical to allow large non-essential shops, fast food premises and now pubs and restaurants with outdoor areas to open and easily managed training facilities to not.

From visiting small essential shops, it is apparent that the necessary processes and practices are not being adhered to by the public or enforced by store owners in the slightest; the outside queuing systems are the only form of adherence to the rules there is. With the risk of transmission being thought to be higher and increased indoors, the risk of spending a possibly unlimited time in a store or outside area in relative close proximity to other people, and in a lot of cases surrounded by people, seems a higher risk than training indoors (with possible increased ventilation), for a limited time with increased distancing and sanitation measures. Particularly if you compare this to areas where people will be consuming alcohol and likely to lose their inhibitions, thus even more likely to flout and disregard the distancing rules and regulations that should be in place (but rarely enforced by traders/retailers).

Hopefully you'll have seen that Paralympian Tanni Grey-Thompson has recently called on the First Minister to name a date to reopen such facilities, again because now, as well as non-essential shops and pubs can reopen/have a date to re-open. I can imagine the leisure sector is already suffering, as well as those who can't access facilities that are an essential and vital part of their health and mental wellbeing. From speaking to several gym owners, it appears that with stringent and sensible measures, such as limiting overall membership numbers, increased hygiene and imposing distancing measures they can open and operate safely.

It appears illogical to many that it is deemed safer for people to be allowed to congregate with strangers in shops, restaurants and pubs albeit outdoors and that it is deemed safer than a properly regulated gym/training facility. As Baroness Thompson expressed in her letter, gyms also have the names and addresses of everyone who comes through the door, can limit numbers, move equipment, have sanitation at every station, and there are already very strict rules on ventilation. The same cannot be said for shops, non-essential or otherwise and particularly not for pubs. There's even the case that people are also now able to book haircuts and other beauty treatments, which means coming into extremely close contact for potentially prolonged periods of time – again seemingly higher risk than the measures that can be put in place at training facilities.

As Thompson's recent letter and comments also point out, there is also the 'social value' in losses that could incur should the closure of these facilities carry on. There is also consideration needed for those who are of a particular disadvantage from closures such as the BAME community and those from less socially economic areas who make up the majority of users. It is a shame for such communities to be disproportionately affected by these measures, especially with no end in sight.

There is also the point around lifting the restrictions around fast-food and not consider businesses who help the health and wellbeing of local populations, who have a far greater and positive impact than 'unhealthy' food options that can be argued are a detriment to society.

I understand the cautiousness of allowing areas to open up at once, but it would be useful to have proper consideration of the above, particularly the rationalisation when comparing it to the decisions to open non-essential shops and pubs/restaurants with outdoor areas (and taking into account the recent scenes in the likes of SoHo when pubs were allowed to open), or at the very least, consideration to provide a date when this issue will have a resolution date. Even if consideration is given to the smaller privately-owned gyms initially rather than large leisure centres as these premises can very much easily control members, distancing and sanitation and impose safe spaces for people to train and exercise again.