

**ASSC SECTORAL SURVEY:  
THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL GATHERING RULES TO  
SELF-CATERING IN SCOTLAND**

**Introduction**

- The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC) is the leading source of knowledge on short-term letting and holiday homes in Scotland. The ASSC conducted a Scotland-wide sectoral survey relating to issues concerning eligibility and access to the various packages of economic support from the Scottish and UK Governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also sought views regarding the exiting lockdown, the recovery phase and how Covid-19 will impact business going forwards.
- The results offer valuable insights from Scottish self-catering operators in a sector that has been estimated to contribute over £723m each year to the Scottish economy.

**Survey Overview**

The ASSC ran a survey in light of the Scottish Government's announcement of restrictions to social gatherings. The limit for groups meeting up (indoors and outdoors) is now a maximum of 6 people from 2 different households, with children under 12 exempt.

- This was publicised via ASSC newsletters, as well as on the ASSC's social media pages on Twitter and Facebook.
- In 24 hours, the online survey elicited 538 responses from self-caterers in Scotland, from both ASSC members and non-ASSC members alike.
- The survey closed at 8pm on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

**Key Findings:**

- **44%** of respondents have a self-catering property accommodating over 6 people.
- Of those 44%, **89%** are concerned about bookings being cancelled.
- In financial terms:
  - 20% of respondents said that they had lost over £5,000 in a three-week period
  - 12 per cent report losses in excess of £10,000
  - In six weeks, the losses pile up to £5,000 for 22% and more than £10,000 for 26% of those asked.
- **In other words, 84 per cent of our members expect to make losses in three weeks and the same percentage also anticipate increased losses in six weeks.**

### **Q1. Where is your business based?**

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Aberdeen City	2
Aberdeenshire	17
Angus	13
Argyll & Bute	61
Clackmannanshire	0
Dumfries & Galloway	34
Dundee City	2
East Ayrshire	1
East Dunbartonshire	1
East Lothian	6
East Renfrewshire	0
Edinburgh City	35
Eilean Siar	12
Falkirk	1
Fife	33
Glasgow City	5

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Highland	161
Inverclyde	0
Midlothian	4
Moray	18
North Ayrshire	17
North Lanarkshire	0
Orkney	6
Perth & Kinross	58
Renfrewshire	0
Scottish Borders	29
Shetland	2
South Ayrshire	4
South Lanarkshire	5
Stirling	22
West Dunbartonshire	5
West Lothian	5

\* Some respondents have properties across a range of local authority areas

### **Q2. How many properties do you own / manage that accommodate over 6 people?**

1	1 property	60%
2	2-5 properties	28%
3	6-10 properties	6%
4	11 properties plus	6%

### **Q3. Does your self-catering property accommodate over 6 people?**

**44%** of respondents have a self-catering property accommodating over 6 people.

### **Q4. What will be the financial impact to your business over the next 3 weeks?**

**Within the next 3 weeks: 84% expect losses**

13% under £1k loss

**39% £1-5k loss**

**20% over £5K**

13% over £10K

### **Q4. What will be the financial impact to your business over the next 6 weeks**

**Within the next 6 weeks: 81% expect increased losses**

7% under £1k

25% over £1-5k loss

23% over £5K

**26% over £10K**

## Comments:

- *Lots of uncertainty and potential for financial loss if bookings are cancelled. Our booking agency does not give a breakdown of how many households make up a group - we don't know if it is up to us as the owners to enforce the law or if it is up to the guests. Uncertainty as to whether refunds should be given for those who have booked our properties since the pandemic began - i.e do we as the owner have to foot the bill?*
- ***The loss of much needed income will be devastating. This comes just as we are beginning to recover from huge losses during the March to July lockdown period. Our large lodge would meet the guidance on safe distancing throughout and guests looking forward to a break are finding it difficult to understand why these new restrictions are being blanket imposed when they can visit restaurants and pubs and mingle amongst people they don't know. The guidance on restrictions also doesn't seem clear to me. Are B & Bs allowed to take guests where they eat in a communal dining area, a bit like self-catering guests? And hotels? Surely the guidance / restrictions on self-catering units could concede that, for example, where there are 5 bedrooms you could have five different adults occupying a bedroom each. I am fearful that a lot of excellent self-catering units will not financially survive these restrictions for more than a few weeks. I would like clarification on whether, say, a firm of 5 men who during the height of the corona virus pandemic would have been classed as essential workers and allowed to stay in self-catering, are now excluded under the new rules from doing so. If they are, what is the justification now, which did not exist then?***
- *Most of our guests have requested cancellations which we are refunding. The impact of this on the local economy has also impacted our community; businesses have worked hard to deliver safe environments welcoming visitors. The confusion with mixed messaging is definitely making people think twice about travel where we live - so close to the English Border.*
- *This will have a detrimental effect on our 2 larger lodges which sleep up to 8 persons. We have already had cancellations this morning and expect more. Filling these gaps at this stage will be difficult.*
- *I have 4 bedroom apartments that accommodate 8 people and have two weddings using these apartments and others within the next 3 weeks they could cancel the whole booking which could result in between £5000-£7500 lose on each occasion.*
- *As a large house we'll suffer. We have to consider cancelling everything and closing the house again. We converted our 12 person bookings to 8 persons to follow guidance. Converting these to 6 persons will be near impossible as our minimum rates won't be attractive to small parties. With operating costs unchanging, we're unable to lower costs.*
- ***This intervention and change to the rules comes just as we try to rescue something from an economically disastrous year. Whilst other sectors such as restaurants have been given huge sums of money to 'make hay' (£500m for eat out to help out), we have to make the best of what is left of our season. Ironically, schemes such as Eat out to help out may have contributed to an early end to our season by encouraging group socialising in concentrated***

**numbers of days, thus possibly resulting in an increased transmission of Covid recently. So our sector (self catering) will take another hit, whilst getting no financial support.**

- *We let large holiday homes in Scotland accommodating 10 or more. As a consequence of this recent announcement, the impact on our business is likely to be worse than the initial lockdown. Government assistance through the grant scheme, self-employment income support scheme, the furlough scheme and the extension to mortgage holidays minimised the financial damage caused by lockdown. None of this support is available to us going forward, yet the impact will be just as great, and much more so if it carries on through Christmas and New Year. Whilst it has been difficult to this point, we've somehow kept the wolves from the door, it's difficult to see how we will get through the winter.*
- *Having to disappoint guests at very short notice; effects customer relations.*
- *Totally unexpected and undermines a significant number of our bookings which are often families from three households. Why so different from England with no of households. Urgently need to get this back up to three households*
- *Our property is four bed-roomed accommodating 8 adults or usually two families. Most out of prime season bookings tend to be groups of adults made up of more than two households ie groups of golfers. For the period of the current restriction it will be difficult to let the property limiting to two households*
- ***The fishing season lasts until the end of October and shooting parties will be impossible. This forms the bulk of our clients from now on in the larger houses. They will all need to be cancelled. We have qualified for no help so far except furlough and rate relief. I understand the measures but will need help to keep on our four staff.***
- *Affects all local tradesmen & suppliers. Once customers lost its hard to get them back. Employment of staff, cleaners & full time employees future threatened. No clients equals no jobs*
- ***The enormous uncertainty of the situation and the way the rules change overnight is causing cancellations almost as fast as bookings. I find the possibility of guests travelling from local lockdown areas concerning. Am I meant to police this? Scottish government has said people should not travel here in this situation but Westminster doesn't prohibit travel I think. With so many ever changing rules it is very hard to keep up with what applies where and I haven't seen a clear map that shows the specifics of local lockdown areas.***
- *Severely. Large Houses are designed for large groups and we have worked hard to ensure that we have adhered to the 'good to Go' standard. This latest legislation is very hard to stomach.*
- *All our bookings will be cancelled which is a disaster for us, we have only started to recover from the first lockdown*
- ***We have no further bookings this year but, if these restrictions continue, we would lose all our existing 2021 bookings valued at c. £80,000***

- *The uncertainty and lack of confidence for probable visitors to the area due to continual backtracking with lockdown restrictions the length and breadth of the UK which is causing havoc in the tourist trade and possible UK guests are scared to book and the European market is non-existent. Time the authorities/associations/Visit Scotland/Visit Britain stopped patting themselves on the back and wake up and smell the decaying roses and acknowledged that the whole of the tourist industry (especially rural accommodation providers have already experienced 2 winters and we are no about to go into the 3rd winter in a row. We do not have monthly pay packets - we rely 100% on visitors coming to the area otherwise we get no pay packet and have had none to speak of since October 2019. If Governments are going to keep impacting our business by locking down/imposing restrictions every 5 minutes then they had better start paying out more aid funding because they are preventing people like myself from making a living and frankly me and people like me have had enough*
- *We have an 8 bedroom self-catering house and these changes will badly effect our business. Today we had to cancel six bookings in Sept and Oct already and give refunds*
- *Bookings have never really recovered. Things are bad and getting worse...*
- *This particular ruling does not affect my business directly. It may have indirect consequences if groups of people who were planning to holiday here decide not to do so and it may affect other neighbouring businesses (such as restaurants) that help create a vibrant tourist destination.*
- *Will need to lay off staff*
- *We are seriously concerned about bankruptcy and repossession*
- *I mainly attract families - 2 parents, 2 children and 4 grand parents, hence from 3 households so I'm finding the 2 household part is more restrictive than the 6 adult part. Especially when the grandparents are looking after children throughout the working week. This could well eradicate 75% of my bookings for the property in the coming weeks unless groups decide to leave one household at home*
- *The decision will have a serious impact upon our business with it unlikely any bookings will go ahead. The impact is even more severe in that no support in way of a grant has been received as our property is one where council tax is payable*
- *Going into winter totally insecure.*
- *Two bookings worth £1600 cancelled already, possibility of further cancellations depending on length of new rule*
- *Loss of bookings that are at enquiry stage at moment, 1 cancelled already and 1 potential cancellation if no change to more than 6 people. I will not be able to fill my empty weeks and am losing out on income for exiting my mortgage holiday in October. Loss of potential business as folk getting too twitchy to book therefore in danger of struggling with mortgage over winter let alone ongoing maintenance. As relatively new business I was not eligible for any if the schemes early on so have had no support and this has been financially hugely damaging .*

- *This is a disaster. Having spent thousands on re-opening, and with no guarantee of winter bookings, our cash flow is now completely compromised. If lenders don't extend holidays, and there is no support, we will go under*
- *We would need to receive additional government financial support or Apply for a further loans/ borrowings in order to meet our business expenses and commitments.*
- *I have already had 4 cancellations (9.00pm on Thursday) totalling over £7k in rent (over £1k in commission). We have so far had 15 enquiries about "what to do?" and expect many more tomorrow. We were pretty well full for September and busy in October so a lot of those bookings are now in jeopardy. In St Andrews we frequently get 4 golfers maybe from 3 different households so technically those bookings can't go ahead either - it is not just houses that sleep more than 6 that could lose bookings.*
- *potentially disastrous - only have bookings for the next 6 weeks*
- *My property sleeps 9, it's mostly more affordable to groups. It's my only source of income (grants don't apply to me).*
- *Devastating news as we were starting to get an air of normality back and have a full calendar over the next six weeks which now could result in a loss of nearly £30,000 in refunds and cancellations which after the four months of summer trading already lost is just too much financially to bear. Need more financial help from the government for self-catering business straight away.*
- *We felt morally obliged to continue paying our housekeeper throughout the first lockdown despite having no bookings. The recent relaxing of restrictions has given us an opportunity to recover somewhat and project based on bookings. We have managed without applying for government support but further cancellations may lead to us having to reassess that decision*
- *We will have the embarrassment of cancelling confirmed bookings and then refunding guests & letting agent fees which will cost us significantly. We will no doubt also lose good faith with our customers!!!*
- *All bookings will have to cancel again with full refund. The special measures put in place during lockdown for safe opening are completely wasted. Already severely impacted this is a second disaster which will lead to the closure of our businesses. This new regulation severely affects us due to our accommodations being specifically for large groups of up to 18*
- *Just slowly started to pick up after a lengthy 6 months of zero income and no government support financial or otherwise. To say deaths are minimal in Scotland, this is getting completely out of control.*
- *With this additional loss of revenue we won't break even this year. We didn't qualify for any grants so it's looking likely that continuing renting will be untenable. The additional cleaning costs are crippling too*
- *Next 3 weeks I have 8 bookings of 7+ people. Lots of admin. To change. Refund, reschedule. Loss of income. Mortgage payments start again next month*

- *We have three 5 bedroom properties. We have had zero income since The week of lockdown. We were hoping to pick some business up in October and November but now it looks like zero moving through to next year.*
- *This has huge impact on my business, financially I am not sure my business can sustain these losses for much longer given the high costs to restart after the first lockdown*
- *disastrous - short notice, and little or no infection in the area. all guests have adhered to the mask in shops, hand sanitiser, social distancing so why are we being penalised for running a much needed business which brings in valuable revenue for a depressed area which depends on an extremely short tourist season. our clientele are not the type to be cramming into small dwellings where social distancing is impossible. they come for the peace and tranquillity of the Highlands but it seems the Scottish Government is not keen to welcome this income stream to enable local people to thrive in small communities. we will have cancellations and will have to re-imburse the customers so not sure that we can open next year as we will have such a very poor cash flow and will be unable to afford to employ local tradesmen, laundry, grocers, butchers etc so the knock on effect will be horrific.*
- *devastating - don't know how I will pay the mortgage*
- *We cater mainly for larger groups so will be severely affected*
- *In the short term we have had three cancellations today, totalling approx. £7,000. We still have a Halloween booking, which may also cancel, and then the big question is whether it will impact our festive bookings. This would not only cause us a loss of around £15,000 in earnings, it would severely impact our survivability in the winter shoulder months*
- *More cancelled bookings and there are no more grants to cover and my insurance policy has renewed, and it no longer covers covid and forced government lockdowns. If this continues, we have no choice but to sell up - I imagine this is what the government would like though*
- *The impact is more about 2 households only rather than the number of guests. We have many groups at our apartments sleeping 6 that are from different households meeting up. We have already turned down a group of 12 arriving on 30 Sept. How do we police this? Do we need written info from guests saying they are from two households only? How do we know if they live together or not?*
- *After the financial impact of lockdown its disastrous. The lack of advance notice was appalling. No idea of when it will be lifted therefore cannot plan. We have a large 15 roomed house, having 8 or even 12 guests in a house of this size is not the same as everyone being in a smaller family house. Is there any evidence of COVID being transmitted as a result of families and friends gathering in holiday accommodation?*
- *We will need to cancel 100% and refund all of our bookings. until the rules change, or we can bring in new bookings for smaller parties, which not likely to be achievable through winter months, especially with a flood of larger properties all having to try and do this too. It is also not financially viable when you have a large property to service, maintain and heat, to have smaller numbers, therefore we may need to close until the rules change again, and this now on top of the additional cleaning guidelines, additional costs already incurred, and 4 months closed. This is a total disaster for our business, and although we appreciate why the*

*government has had to do this, and support all rational measures, our sector now needs additional support, or we will be forced to close and sack our staff.*