

Central London pubs to close doors by weekend as Omicron keeps office workers away

The boss of London's City Pub Group has revealed his venues in the City and other office-centred areas will close for Christmas early as the impact of work-from-home guidance and Omicron warnings has meant there is "no one around".

Clive Watson told the Standard his sites in Old Street and on the Strand would usually close on Christmas Eve after colleagues' farewell drinks.

But today he said: "By this Friday central London is going to be deserted. No one is going to be going to work next week.

"Anything that's office worker-related in central London will be closed down by the weekend."

Watson said bar staff from shuttered locations will be redeployed to suburban London pubs where trade has "held up", but managers are struggling to fill rotas as so many staff are off sick or isolating with Omicron.

"It's best to redeploy staff where there is more business," he said.

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The pubs veteran said his firm is delivering staff full pay while they are off with Covid, but warned that many smaller operators will not be able to do so and that some hospitality staff will “not get paid over Christmas”.

Watson said: “There is an increasing number of staff who have got Covid and are unable to come to work, and that is clearly putting pressure on our staff rotas to find the staff to keep the pubs open for this time. We went through this in July with the pingdemic, and we’re going through it again.”

He added: “It would be massively helpful if the Government could reintroduce some form of furlough scheme.”

The Omicron variant’s already widespread transmission is leading to huge numbers of pub, bar and restaurant workers around the country having to stay home and self-isolate.

This has compounded the industry’s ongoing staffing shortage experienced for much of the year.