

## **Daily Post Column – Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales**

As another Bank Holiday has passed when we weren't able to welcome visitors to Wales as we would have liked, I am very aware of the impact this has on the tourism, events and hospitality industry.

This is a sector which is vital to North Wales as it brings around £1.6 billion annually through domestic and international visitors and it is one of the largest employers in the region. Three of the top five areas with both the largest proportions of tourism businesses and the largest proportions of people employed in tourism are in North Wales - Gwynedd, Conwy and Anglesey.

We will welcome visitors back with open arms but for now we need to keep people safe and protect our NHS.

I'd like to pay tribute to all those tourism businesses which have been helping their communities and the NHS at this time, by providing accommodation or running food delivery schemes. Thank you for all you do.

We are doing what we can now to help the industry at this unprecedented and difficult time and we are also looking at future support.

Last week I announced that Phase 2 of the Economic Resilience Fund will have an update to the micro scheme. This will enable limited companies who are not VAT registered to access the Fund, something which many small businesses, especially those in the hospitality sector have been calling for.

The package of support offered by the Welsh Government is the most generous for businesses anywhere in the UK.

It includes £100 million in loans to more than 1,000 businesses through the Development Bank of Wales and a £400 million Economic Resilience Fund grant scheme – which for phase 1 has received more than 9,500 applications, with over 6,000 offers already made to date worth over a £100m.

It also has non-domestic rates based grant support for small businesses and businesses operating in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, awarding to date 51,100 grants worth more than £626m.

A total package of £1.7 billion worth 2.7% of GDP.

The challenges we face are significant, no one can be under any illusions about the difficulties ahead of us.

But there is also hope. We have seen compassion and ingenuity in the way businesses have stepped up to the plate to help their communities and the NHS.

It is this spirit which can be seen across Wales which is heartening at this time.

We will get through this crisis and we will build back better in our visitor and wider economy, in our communities and in our public services.

And we will work together to do it.