

## Meeting (1) of Tourism Group – 10am, Friday, 27 March 2020

### Participants

Deputy Minister, Culture, Sport and Tourism	Stephen Jones
Jason Thomas	Paula Ellis
Rob Holt	Phillipa George
Mari Stevens	Ian Edwards
Rhidian Morgan	Steve Hughson
Lucy von Weber	Dave Chapman
Jo Corke	Michael Bewick
Peter Francombe	Anthony Rosser
Adrian Greason Walker	Andrew Campbell
Sean Taylor	

**Version: FINAL**

### Note of main points

#### 1. Introductions and a few words from the Deputy Minister

1.1 Jason Thomas JT thanked all for coming together today. The Deputy Minister (DM) offered his thanks for the cross-sector co-operation and the positive attitude and spirit that would keep the sector together through this. The DM was pleased with the co-operation of tourists who left Wales when asked to, and acknowledged that there were now clear legal powers to stop any new visits.

#### 2. Visit Wales update – Jason Thomas

2.1 JT gave thanks and respect to those present and others in the sector in terms of their conduct and action since the start of this crisis. The purpose of today's meeting was to get a better understanding of the immediate threats facing those in the group (who were representative of the sector), to outline WG's further plans and to agree on better comms over the coming weeks.

2.2 The main points made by JT were as follows:

- Clear that impact on the tourism sector was cataclysmic – biggest crisis ever faced;
- Determining who was most at risk first and conscious of iterations to come;
- Many other sectors also under strain;
- Those present had been supportive and working in partnership but there was some descent in the sector;
- VW work had been repurposed to focus on Covid;
- Waited to see UK Gov response so as to determine where the gaps were. JT ran through the package of measures taken by WG and UK Government and pointed out we were also part of the national Government and part of the solution;
- Even though there was business support, furlough subsidies and measures for the self-employed, cashflow had not been addressed directly as yet;

- There would be an announcement on Monday (30 March) about further support for businesses.
- There had been some unintended consequences of WG departing from the automatic allocation of business rate relief for businesses rated at £500,000 or above (aimed at supermarkets). JT gave reassurance that did not mean we were entirely removing support for meeting these costs. Eligibility would be assessed on a case by case basis by the WG and JT advised those caught by this should not pay business rates until this had been looked at.

### 3. Updates from regions and industry body representatives

3.1 JT invited those present from the industry to provide updates. Their key points included:

(Adrian Greason Walker)

- Was the £500k net or gross; some frustration that the information on support was not getting to everyone;
- Loans were tricky – not all banks on board or geared up for this.

(Stephen Jones)

- The new regulations on travel and caravan parks etc were helpful and most “normal” business had ceased.

(Paula Ellis)

- South West Forum was grateful for the action taken but more needed, especially around cashflow – and quickly;
- Pembs CC needed more info for those with personal businesses. Self-employed, skilled workers;
- Pembs Tourism was helping those businesses trying to claim from insurance;
- The National Botanic Garden were furloughing staff but wanted guidance on NI and pensions;
- Folly Farm’s overheads when closed are similar to when it is open as they still need to employ vets and animal carers to look after their zoo and farm animals. Future accommodation developments will be placed on hold which will affect their long term growth plan;
- JT said that in the longer term there would need to be an action plan to help the industry recover. The insurance issue went beyond WG but could write for the sector to UK Government to ask them to look at the insurance issue. There was also an immediacy around animals which would also need to be considered. **(ACTION: Insurance and animal considerations for attractions to be considered).**

(Phillipa George)

- Nia Hollins from the Vale had been sending helpful info to help SMEs;
- Some of the larger caravan sites were also caught by the unintended consequence of the business rate relief;
- Issues around rate relief and refunds – flexibility needed on a number of issues e.g. refunds affected cashflow;
- Some positives: circulation of info from VW and Vale; good legal advice on refunds from business organisations; pubs diversifying into the take-away market. But not much encouragement from the banks.
- JT said that having spoken to a bank already would help fast track any application under the fund being announced Monday.

- Some caravan parks were also offering extensions on rent for clients RH said Conwy CBC was already considering this.

(Ian Edwards)

- IE said that VW & WG had absolutely executed the right strategy, dovetailing with UK Government response.
- Timing was crucial in terms of cashflow so was there a way to give the heads up soon of the additional support? JT said that there would be an industry bulletin over the weekend trailing this.
- Support being offered was amazing but a long term plan of recovery was needed given this was unprecedented. Would businesses be weaned off incrementally? DM agreed tapered support was necessary and he had raised this in his fourth recent meeting with his UK counterparts.
- IE mentioned he had 1,000 furloughed people and could redirect to help out if required.

(Dave Chapman)

- Grateful for UK and WG support; there were pressures on public services and we needed to pull together. DC was concerned that the grants and loans would be overwhelmed and money would run out. JT said that the way the fund was set up would allow further funding to be put into it if deemed significant and could respond quickly.
- DC raised the business rate relief issue – 17 of the larger businesses were caught by this and there was a danger of reputational damage to WG. JT said that we were doing our very best to wrestle with this particular, important issue. DC was supportive and appreciate hands had been tied on this issue. SJ added that LAs wanted to keep these hotels open and perhaps they could help. **RH and SJ would pick this up outside the meeting (ACTION).**

(Michael Bewick)

- Like others concern is cashflow;
- Snowdonia had been overwhelmed last week – people loved north Wales and they were told to go home. Understood reasons but how would we make sure we bring them back “afterwards”- how will we promote, what are the timescales? We needed to be developing strategies and message consistently. DM confirmed there was never random messaging, always done with the industry.
- MS completely agreed with MB and mentioned the “Visit Wales. Later.” strapline and the planning being done for medium term messaging when the time was right, and then long term recovery - not just marketing but product development too.
- PG thought there would be a rise in the staycation “afterwards”.

(Steve Hughson)

- Thanked the DM and VW; was aware of similar bank horror-stories; strategies and plans for the future necessary; what would happen after 31 May.
- RWAS had been cancelled; so disappointed to have to make that decision – other events in similar boat
- RH said that events were not being ignored and were an important part of the package of support. **RH would give SH a call to discuss (ACTION).**

#### **4. Collation of information going forward from regions**

4.1 There was a caveated suggestions of a WhatsApp group given the fast moving, unprecedented situation. JT was interested in knowing as soon as possible the general reaction to Monday's announcements from their groups/regions etc.

#### **5. Future of this group – One Voice**

5.1 The discussion had been useful and JT called for another meeting of this group at the end of next week **(ACTION- AB to set up meeting – Discharged)**.

#### **6. AOB**

6.1 JC gave an update of the research and analysis being undertaken in relation to this issue. JT felt that the Business Barometer would be an incredibly useful tool for the future with also some “in the moment” information too.

6.2 JT and DM thanked all for being part of the meeting and commented how much friends and colleagues were valued, especially at a time like this.

Alyson Burke  
27 March 2020