

Tourism Taskforce meeting 15:00, 14th October 2020

Participants:

Deputy Minister, CST	WG	Adrian Greason-Walker	WTA
Jason Thomas - Director	WG	Stephen Jones	WLGA
Mari Stevens	WG	Paula Ellis	SW Forum Chair
Rob Holt	WG	Ian Edwards	VB Board rep
Rhidian Morgan	WG	Steve Hughson	MW Forum Chair
Lucy Von Weber	WG	Philippa George	SE Forum Chair
Jo Corke	WG	Michael Bewick	North Forum Chair
Claire Chappell	WG	Andrew Campbell	WTA
Helen Butler	WG	Dave Chapman	UK Hospitality C
Jo Starkey	WG	Anthony Rosser	UK Hospitality C
		Sean Taylor	UK TIC Rep

Version: Final

Chaired by Mari Stevens

Main points of the meeting

Mari Stevens thanked everyone for attending at short notice. Meeting was arranged to discuss response around WG considering a Fire Breaker. Lockdown will be time limited to control the virus. The meeting is to focus on the initial views on the limitations and measures in the sector to feedback to relevant colleagues. If this is to happen will be announced next week.

Rob Holt said that decisions aren't finalised but expect something at the end of week with leading time. NI gone for 4 weeks, anticipating between 2-4 weeks but nothing confirmed. Many questions around the lockdown with education, travel restrictions etc. Detail involved is still being worked on and have already reflected the industry views that many businesses would prefer to be closed to access the financial packages.

Jason Thomas confirmed that there is going to be a FB, currently looking at different lengths of periods in order to take back the R number to a much lower number to buy time. This is to ease the pressure on the NHS as Andrew Goodall has said the bed capacity is full. Measures will be at a national level and will be restrictive. Feeding into the discussion if hospitality is to close, to confirm at the same time what support is available and for it to be clear. Important to put an end date so business know that it's a short period and provide information for what happens at the end of the FB.

RH discusses the events side, not just about that events never opened it's difficult for the events industry as it needs to be seen to be closed to access the support. Discusses position in terms of attractions. Tourism and hospitality is pretty clear, some areas not so clear and need to be sure around accessing support.

Steven Hughson said if a business has to be shut down because of these restrictions then they will be able to benefit from 67% support for wages. Events don't fall into that category as they never opened, if events treated the same as hospitality, tourism and leisure sectors they should be able to benefit and access the support packages.

Michael Bewick appreciated the briefing and reflected on several calls this week. Must be able to clearly state what employment support will be put in place at the same time as the FB announcement. Level of anger in the industry will be very high indeed and could end up

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losing good people. What happens at the end? This could happen again! As part of the conversation when this one finishes, there might be another one - how do we start to approach that? Clarity on what has to be closed; if attractions will be closed as part of this need to be clear they have to close, if it created any confusion with access to support.

Paula Ellis echoed the same point regarding support. Disappointing to hear the whole of Wales would go into a FB as Pembrokeshire has the lowest covid rate in mainland UK. Businesses are interested to know whether we will go back to the 5 mile rule? Made a plea in the forum meeting earlier to WG colleagues if we have to take the FB, consideration to be given for the first week of November to take advantage of the high occupancy over the English and Welsh half terms. November to pre-festive season is the quietest time of year and would be better for business. Could glean a lot of business in the local areas and so could the other counties. Decision has been based on schools rather than the largest industry in Wales which is tourism and hospitality– really disappointing.

MS said the situation is so bad can't afford to wait but worth feeding this back in case there is a bit of flexibility in the margins. Difficult to get the balance right to get the behavioural change and message clear.

Ian Edwards discusses it's difficult to have a conversation until we know the answers to the questions. What does a national lockdown look like? Not helpful to have an informed conversation. Two to three week FB, what does it look like when we come out? Will we be in the same place in 3 weeks' time? What notice will we receive to say the numbers are looking good/looking bad? It would be useful to know what the WG vision is. What is the definition of lockdown? CMR can only take people from the Newport area – that can't sustain the business. **MS** set out the need to jointly identify and shape the sector fields to work out if certain things should be allowed to stay open or closed to access the financial support. **RH** said clearly the situation going forward is impossible to predict, hopefully the FB is effective and get the R rate back down and release pressure on NHS. We have fed into the discussion the need for clarity of messaging around what's closed, travel rules etc. **MS** discussed the fact if closing businesses, do we allow certain businesses to remain closed to access funding even though the wider community is open? Some would have enough local business to re-open, this then would be more for the larger serviced accommodation. **IE** asks if there is a state aid rule on this support scheme and if the money is definitely secured? **MS** said discussions on detail is ongoing including with treasury, this is the priority.

RH said hope is UKG scheme applies across the UK from 23 October but not looking likely so WG putting forward alternatives – costs of this scheme is estimated £400m a month, WG haven't got that fire power. Discussion is on the detail of the UKG scheme, that's why the definition of what is closed is so important.

Dave Chapman thanks for the notice, time is essential as there is a lot of fear, anger and frustration. Big concern around implementation and support. Following the announcement there is huge potential for behaviour change in a negative way which is a worry. If it's brought forward the industry needs to know if it will be a Friday or Monday for financial reasons bearing in mind the commercial opportunities around certain days. The FB needs to be planned.

-On the support side, in March support packages were considered appropriate in order to protect the economy and businesses. We had a furlough scheme that lasted 6 months that gave higher percentage than the new scheme plus we had packages of grants to sustain through the period of no trading - should be receiving those now.

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-The industry also needs a tailored hardship fund. Events/Weddings have had nothing. Know a lot more of the illness now with guidelines developed, have good track record of behaviour in the industry. First Minister has said that there is no evidence that the spread of the virus comes from hospitality. Therefore, when we shut down should be reimbursed.

-Moving into the Christmas period, which is the last hope of a commercial surge, we will be back to social distancing and reduced capacity of around 30–50% again and a vastly different clientele.

-We need information, when do we start the FB, when will it finish and what will it entail? Need to over-come public perceptions with businesses being safe to visit after the FB. We should not go back to the 10pm close – no full justification of this and looking at a more open arrangement and let the industry control.

-MS mentions that it will be interesting to see if the evidence shows any benefit to the 10pm curfew and will be reviewed at that point.

SH mentions there needs to be a very clear definition of what is closed. Royal Welsh for example is technically closed because we can't have events on site. Currently bringing staff back in to plan for the future. It could be argued we are not closed as staff are working. However, if you can't carry out the service of what you are opened to do you are technically closed. Need wide clarity around definition of closed. Should take the lock down head on, simplicity is the key to takes us back to a position to get on top of the R number, back to business and plan for the future.

Adrian G-W discusses the feeling of anger amongst members, detecting some feeling of resignation. Need to prove the statistical case for whatever happens next and then clearly explained to the public. Not sure the public appetite or the industry appetite for the restrictions/lockdown. Concern how closely some members will stick to adhering to any new measures. Lot of members are objecting to lockdown in rural areas where there is not a high covid rate. It has been said that tourism is part of the solution not a problem as cases have not risen because of tourism.

Philippa George agrees with everything but this does continue to not be helpful to the "seasonality group" which is a huge amount of the LA economy. The only way of dealing with the virus is a hardship fund but there does not seem to be anything on the agenda to suggest there will be one. Seasonality businesses isn't a lifestyle business. Need to be aware that some of these are big businesses, like events seen to be missed out. For seasonality businesses in 2020, many will have only opened for 2 months out of 12. Again, lockdown won't get rid of the virus we need to get hold of the R rate and cut everything down.

Anthony Rosser discusses the need for financial support, a depoliticised agenda and an opportunity to plan because if we are going into lockdown need to give time to plan properly.

Andrew Campbell discusses the announcement of the travel ban stopping people travelling from hot spots in England to Wales. Timing isn't particularly clever putting offside a key market for Wales. 70% of Wales is in an unrestricted area. Some businesses can trade safely, use the rural/micro businesses to try and help us get through as they seem to be getting penalised. Our numbers are way lower than England but our restrictions are tougher. Been supportive of the FM but not the FB given the time businesses will have to close, some won't reopen. The money isn't enough from the feedback received, it helps but operating costs much greater. Need to find a way through and not give into it.

-MS said the ambiguous measures taken the more confusion with messaging which are the issues. The travel ban has been announced today 15:00.

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Sean Taylor said need to be realistic and decisive - can't be half closed, sector should be locked down until February next year, we should get rid of the awful virus and reopen next year.

Stephen Jones discusses the challenging situation. Divisive in LG, the evidence behind decisions is critical, public policy point of view if we could get UKG and WG to work together. We should mothball tourism & hospitality until spring next year. It's damaging in and out in terms of mental health/wellbeing and is confusing. Hospitality and tourism are critical to the Welsh economy and the way the virus is going in Europe and Britain is a threat. The UK has become dependent on services, it's a service economy and not being able to travel and mixing is damaging.

RH discusses the mix views, lot of pressures on WG to close down sectors, pressure from rural areas to stay open as numbers are not huge and nowhere near places like Liverpool and the balance is difficult. Knowing what the exit strategy is one of the key things. What is the scientific evidence going in and coming out and what does that mean. Continue to press for funding, and get the funding out as quickly as possible.

MS said it's very hard to look forward with clear optimism, in the South West Forum discussions gave a little bit of hope as it's ironic that the sector will recover, so much demand out there. Tough few months ahead thank you for the feedback, we will make sure they are fed back straight away. If the FB could work, might have the Christmas period to look forward to.

DMfCST draws the meeting to an end, discussing it was a very realistic meeting.

Next Meeting: Friday 16th October 2020.

Ffion Evans-Humphreys
19th October 2020