

Meeting (25) of Tourism Group – 10:30-12:30, Friday 16th October 2020

Participants:

Minister MH,W&WL	WG	Sean Taylor	UK TIC Rep
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
Phillip Abraham	WG	Michael Theaker	WG

Version: Final

Main points of the Meeting

1. Update from the Deputy Minister and Jason Thomas

Jason Thomas starts the meeting with the key discussion points around the plan of a Firebreak. Broad proposal is short, sharp, brutal with intention to change the transmission of the R rate. FM doesn't want a myriad of exceptions for these rules. Aware that by announcing a FB, will have to announce the support packages. Focus the discussion on views of what you would like at the end of the FB. The overall message will be to stay at home for two weeks to hopefully, restore some freedoms.

DMfCST said the new/reformed financial packages, looked at what UKG provided and what WG can do to top that or develop it further. Response has to be economic and social.

Mitchell Theaker said how valuable and helpful the information from this group has been previously and grateful for this. Internal discussions on the notes from these meetings has resulted in strong feedback.

Rob Holt said Wednesday afternoon there were many sectoral meetings and fed in the basis of the meetings to Mitchell. Direct link from this group into the thinking. Doesn't mean that we can influence everything but the thoughts and discussion are fed in.

Taskforce members raised the following points:

- What do these packages look like?

JT discusses the funding and the Chancellors announcement. Conscious we need to announce this on Monday with the Firebreak.

- Will the firebreak be a maximum of 2 weeks?

JT said the discussion are still ongoing.

-It is important for the industry to know what happens on the other side. Do we go back to local lockdown? Would be helpful to know what's going to happen at the other end.

-Broad discussion on travel restrictions.

Meeting (25) of Tourism Group – 10:30-12:30, Friday 16th October 2020

JT makes the point that SME and micro businesses are not forgotten about. JT discusses that the FM wrote to the PM twice to point out issues with the travel policy in England and FM in the end acted on that.

-There were concerns raised that the industry does not feel it is being listened to, such as decisions being made on education which impact tourism.

JT said we are one Welsh Government and when we make decisions we take everything into account.

DMfCST argues strongly to respect that tourism business operates Friday to Friday don't see why this should be an issue, need to respect the booking cycle.

-There was further lengthy discussion on the need to support SME and microbusiness. Many businesses falling through the cracks and haven't been addressed; example of business who employed 5 people legally from HMRC but because owner is a sole trader, won't get anything - might be fortunate to get £1,000 through the hardship fund.

Rhidian Morgan discusses that this is a real problem and shares a spreadsheet to show the latest figures to the group. Collective problem struggling to come with a solution in terms of supporting and identifying those legitimate businesses. Lot of businesses fall out of the system into the sole trader business category and end up not being eligible and is a problem for the WG. Simply can't identify the businesses, if we could come up with a solution for those deserving of the support and those that aren't.

-In response members suggested statutory registration or HMRC registration to prove that you are an employer.

JT discusses that WG can't verify that, we don't have access to HMRC data. We have to prevent fraud. UKG scheme frauded out of millions and millions of pounds. Can't save everyone, will save ones we can verify. Statutory regulations will continue to look at if it's feasible.

-Concerns raised about terminology: circuit-breakers, firebreaker – mass confusion just keep to one term.

-Comments raised on the need to have a clear marketing strategy around this.

JT said we have a brilliant marketing team and expertise in terms of how to position Wales. Confident we will come up with the right messaging at the right time.

MfMH, W&WL discusses that no decision has been made yet re. firebreak and support will be available if this firebreak happens. Clear we recognise there are different rates of the virus throughout Wales. Whole society approach to coincide with half term to balance the education for children as an entirety of Wales rather than sector specific way. Looking to make sure the evidence is there for the R rate to fall from 1.3 down to 0.8-1.0 for Christmas to be possible and to keep the NHS afloat. Both Minister referenced concerns with Cabinet yesterday just to make sure people were aware of the impact on the sector of needing to think of what happens after.

Meeting (25) of Tourism Group – 10:30-12:30, Friday 16th October 2020

-Members appreciated the support from Ministers. There was a request for predictive analysis to assist planning for signature events next year, such as the Royal Welsh.

MfMH, W&WL acknowledged this is challenging. We can't predict what's going to happen, all depends on a vaccine and will take a long time for that to be rolled out.

-There were strong representations made on behalf of large businesses - this sector shows the true economic strength, vital the bigger units to keep the economy moving along. Potential closure for next week will mean the half term lost, The Telegraph said people will turn to overseas holidays.

JT said the impact of this whole sector is well understood. Both Minister made this argument to Cabinet over the last few months.

-There was then a broad discussion on communication and leadership. Danger of the coming weeks of sentiment going badly for the visitors and visitor economy. The senior leaders, voices against that mood would be a powerful boost for the industry. Firebreak will effectively make a bad situation worse for businesses, short period might be improved but the gap was already too large for ERF 3 to fill. Issues of value for money – lot of businesses losing staff numbers, could verify the amount that people are going to get for the winter on current staff numbers now could leave a lot of businesses in a precarious position.

Mari Stevens working on several levels to review the way we talk about Wales in general. Main priority will be engaging with communities, Minister keen on this. Restarting in Wales the narrative around how important the economic contribution of businesses. How important being a welcoming nation is, the Addo campaign has done this. Telling the story to Wales of importance of sector to build those bridges. **Lucy Von Weber** expands on what Mari said looking at national level as well, importance of businesses communicating with their audiences. All of the small businesses that contribute to how Wales is perceived.

-Raised the concept of 'a few more pounds' and agrees with the DM around the Friday to Friday model. Very simple information to communicate to the industry in plain English and Welsh with the legal arguments at the end of the comments.

JT ensures the point around comms and the simplicity is understood. Enhanced job support scheme could be bought forward to next Friday 23rd.

-Raised that 8 days of the FB would have been in the furlough, disadvantages Wales to England. Consumer confidence has gone; Rib Ride, Snowdonia Rail Way closed. 30% up in July and August now 80% down.. Strategically two weeks firebreak not decisive enough.

Jo Cork discusses the headlines of the latest research surveys, under embargo and will be published Tuesday and the perimeter the following week.

-Members thanked Jo for the update and there was a discussion on potential future joint working.

DMfCST thanks everyone and closes the meeting.

Ffion Evans-Humphreys,
22nd October 2020.