

Meeting (27) of Tourism Group – 10:30, Friday 30th October 2020

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
Michael Theaker	WG	Steve Hughson	MW Forum Chair
Lucy Von Weber	WG	Philippa George	SE Forum Chair
Claire Chappell	WG	Michael Bewick	North Forum Chair
Tara Croxton	WG	Andrew Campbell	WTA
Helen Butler	WG	Dave Chapman	UK Hospitality C
Jo Starkey	WG	Anthony Rosser	UK Hospitality C
David Stephens	WG	Sean Taylor	UK TIC Rep

Apologies; Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language.

Version: Final

Main points of meeting

1. Update and Welcome

Mari Stevens chairs the meeting and explains the latest position around the post-Fire Break and mentions that there are still ongoing Cabinet discussions. She discusses the important element of whether businesses will be able to access funding if they are forced closed or not. Certain sectors will inevitably still be closed, nightclubs & events haven't re-opened since March and unless things improve considerably, will remain closed. This is subject to the 21-day review based on Public Health Wales decision.

Deputy Minister reassures that discussions are being directly fed into Government. First Minister is very appreciative of what the sector has done and how tourism is managed in the current contexts. This will not be forgotten, and when things improve, the sector will be recognised as the area of Welsh life and Government policy that behaved.

Rob Holt discusses the household elements, 10pm curfew and JSS scheme with WG in discussion with UK treasury on the definition of this scheme.

2. Taskforce members raised the following points:

- Clarity around 23rd September, correct to say you're not eligible if you've employed staff after that date? Business in WTA employed 82 staff since that date and want to know what the position is?

Officials discuss the regulations with PAYE.

- Discussion on anomalies and the need for clarity. Royal Welsh continues to operate under the JSS closed, open in terms of staff working on reduced hours with preparations for next year but the premises is closed in terms of the scheme. Clarification on other events such as Celtic Manor who have two elements; hotel and conferences? Main site can't be used for particular events at the moment but the business is still working. Disappointed with UK Government as no further guidance received from HMRC.

Officials said whilst closed, businesses are still able to operate at a certain level and when the next set of regulations kick in, it needs to be developed in that context. Have raised

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businesses like Celtic Manor who have conference and hotel elements. The official mentions that the team are working to get the right balance with the nuances.

Deputy Minister said open and closed is far too simplicity, closed for a specific event at a particular time. He continues to say that you can't dismiss people who are planning long/medium term for events. There has to be capacity to organise events, when events are possible. DM is happy to discuss directly with the FM if there are any issues.

- Concerns around smaller venues losing business events throughout Wales and collectively losing business. Shouldn't be focusing on just the larger venues.
- Discussions continue around having answers to JSS and members ask if this is at the discretion of the Welsh Government, do businesses get the extension on JRS and is the 20% mentioned by UKG available in Wales?

Officials explain that there are no issues between 1st and 9th November, question is what happens after the 9th November. Currently writing a letter to Treasury from WG colleagues for clarity on this position, and confirms that JSS applies across the UK.

- Huge concerns with Wedding venues as they are closed but if they offer accommodation as something they didn't before, are they closed or are they open?

Official explains the 21-day cycle around committing to legally being closed.

Officials discuss the update on ERF 3, which closed last night due to the level of demand for funding. Numerous businesses had technical difficulties and it's confirmed that they have the opportunity to re-submit the application. £30m worth of applications from Tourism and Hospitality businesses and is over-subscribed. Potentially will review if further funding is available but this is the position now.

- ERF and the mental health impact on business owners discussed. Strategically the first come first serve basis is not the right way to give public funds to the industry with a closing date of 25th November and closing within 24hrs. For those who missed the chance, if more money is available, should be made priority next time. Poor alternative system to Furlough, does not suite the SME's only bigger businesses. Important to try and get a better system in place before ERF 4.

Jason Thomas updates on key findings and the group have a confidential discussion about the possible restrictions post 9th November, which are still subject to change.

- Points made on non-domestic business rates due to large businesses being forced closed with no rates exemption. Some businesses have written to the Valuation Office Agency and not received a holding response, asks if anything could be done to put pressure on VOA?

Officials discuss the issue of businesses above £500,000 who didn't get the rate relief – no indication that is going to change. Explains in terms of VOA the lack of response on a range of things and this has been raised with Ministers.

- Discussion around the concept of attracting visitors back to Wales. Need a clear road map with direction to open individual destinations. How to start promoting

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Wales? Worried that organisations like DMO's that undertake part in this function have fallen through the gaps of any resource. Over time when it comes to relaunching, the tourism industry will have no money to do it effectively and properly. Need something solid like a code of practice with an incremental plan for moving forward.

Deputy Minister added that he will take this forward in relation to DMO's to try and establish a relationship directly for the future as this is about organising tourism for restoration. He reiterates that it's on the basis of PHW decision, but we have to be ready (**Action**).

Officials explain the position; still in a PH crisis, transmission still rising and believe FB will certainly help and hopefully, allow more freedoms. Putting trust in the public to adhere to eventually allowing sectors to open. Difficult balance, plea for sensitive communications, reinforcing the PH message. Official reminds the group of the Addo campaign and importance of revisiting and getting visitors to engage.

- Concerns of excluding tier 2 & 3 and the fear factor of these tiers. Worry that Wales still seen to be closed. An example of Devon being open to all tiers with the infection rate relatively low, suggests negotiations to not exclude tier 2 & 3. Businesses have a relationship with their guests, get them to download and sign the agreement of Addo before they arrive – use the opportunities from digital technology.

Official discusses the risks with tier 2 & 3, lawyers are working through the details of the regulations at the moment. Important point of not characterising people as carrying the virus.

- Situation in North Wales without customers and the consumer confidence is shattered. Miss-guided and delusional to open activities and attractions after half term and interesting to see if the R rate will be higher in Conwy than before lockdown. Maintained opinion that it's better for the industry to close until January/February as opening on 9th November to nothing. Comments made that it's not just a health issue it's also an economical issue.

Official discusses the significant challenges post 9th November. Some areas of the economy want to open, some don't. The rationale for WG to close things are purely on PHW grounds. Need to focus on support packages to get the sector through.

- Discussions with WAVA on challenges around animal attractions, which is an economic issue. Strategically, need to think of segmenting the sector in terms of the support and this would address the issues. Animal attractions are not going to be able to put staff on JSS as the animals need to be cared for. Significant issue for the media and would be damaging for Welsh tourism as animals are currently being rehomed.
- Reputational concerns across the border of Wales's reputation taking a huge hit, need to make sure that public communication is done very well moving forward.

Official discuss the issues around influencing the UK media and Visit Wales will share own story moving forward. Discusses that there isn't a direct correlation between the media view and the consumer view of Wales.

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- Questions around lockdown in England if that would affect Wales?

Officials explains ability of WG to make own decisions for the benefit of Wales, when able to do it jointly they will. Welsh Ministers are making decisions on protecting the people of Wales. Clearly would have a knock on impact, it's not mandate to follow suite. The Deputy Minister continues explaining the Consequential Barnett formula of 5% funding for Wales on spending on issues, which are devolved.

- Points around the psychological benefits of being free from local lockdown to visit relatives and friends from different groups.
- Urgent need for hardship fund £8-10m for Wedding venues and could save jobs. If possible, to look longer term to the beginning of next season. Would be beneficial to have a task and finish group to look at the arguments to help enlighten circumstances to inform some change when conditions allow.

Official said that they are looking to bring a hospitality group together to look at mitigations.

- Concerns that test events won't be happening until the Spring. Huge impact on Wales's signature events and is devastating news.
- Thoughts on non-shared facilities, specifically for the large holiday accommodation on campsites, suggestion for thoughts to this. **(Action – RH)**.

Mari Stevens closes the meeting and thanks everyone for their contributions.

Next meeting – 6th November 2020.

Ffion Evans-Humphreys
5th November 2020