

Meeting (2) of Tourism Group – 10:30am, Friday, 3 April 2020

Participants

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

Apologies: Ian Edwards

Version: FINAL

Note of main points

1. Update

1.1 The Deputy Minister (DM) and Jason Thomas (JT) thanked all for all their efforts and hard work under such difficult circumstances. The following points were covered:

- The new £100million loan fund had gone live on Monday and the response had been incredible. Rhidian Morgan (RM) confirmed a thousand applications received in less than a week. There was no breakdown by sector as yet but it was a credit to all present for contributing to such a significant response.
- Rob Holt (RH) and JT confirmed that the policy on business rates for business with rateable value >£500k would not be changed despite strong representations from sector. Those affected would be able to apply for support via the Economic Resilience Fund.
- JT said that there would be further information being announced as soon as possible on the detail of the £400million element of the Economic Resilience Fund. DM confirmed the intention was for the fund to be open to all business, including tourism. WG teams were being reorganised to assist in administering the Fund.
- JT referred to an open letter that had been sent by a small tourism business which illustrated how each of the measures would affect the business; one example was the Micro and Small Business grant – the “small” company had 9 employees and could claim up to £10k. If it had 10 employees, it could claim up to £100k.

2. Reaction to financial support and updates from Sector colleagues

2.1 The main points fed back by tourism sector colleagues were as follows:

- All thanked WG for the effort and support. This had been a disaster on a global scale and it was important that we all learnt from this and pulled together.

(Impact)

- It was important to remember that in the wake of all the significant support being offered that the tide had not been stemmed and we should not be complacent as

things were still precarious. There was anxiety about cashflow and lockdown was likely to be longer than first anticipated.

(Banks)

- Some businesses were reporting that some of the banks were being slow to assist and not working with businesses. One of the big high street banks had been particularly unhelpful.
- RM and JT reassured that the DBW would want to know whether businesses had contacted their banks – and that if they had not been sympathetic, it would not count against them.
- Some good news stories – one business was paying 100% of staff wages. And a local hotel and community had, that day, received £100,000 from DBW. A local shop and petrol station had also received funding. Appreciated not all would have capacity to access the support and would need guidance, especially the smaller businesses.

(Business Rates)

- Important not to underestimate some of the “big names” being hit by the change of policy with business rates – hotels and other establishments which were single ownership businesses.
- Sector colleagues would provide as much information as possible to help make the case for those businesses hit by the business rate change. It was important that the capital city continued to have high quality accommodation.
- Looking forward to hearing the detail of the Economic Resilience Fund and hoped progress could be made on the rate relief issue.
- JT said that there whilst there was no change in policy there would be a mechanism for those business to make a strong case.

(Furloughing staff)

- It would be 3-6 months before we were back to anything near normal yet there had been no further information on furloughing post May. JT said that it appeared that things were on a three-week rotational and it would probably be reviewed at some point but nothing had been heard to date on that point.
- It was difficult to plan effectively without knowing what would happen beyond May and as such some businesses were laying people off.
- What was the procedure on furloughing as not all had been able to access the HMRC portal. How would they access it and how quickly would they receive the funding?
- Concern about seasonal staff falling outside the furloughing arrangements.

(Next phase)

- Some thought we would be moving from emergency stage to planning stage by the end of next week; and within 3-4 weeks businesses would need mentoring by experts.
- Understanding the recovery phase was important and businesses needed to know how long lockdown would continue. The Tourism Sector would need guidance around this.

(Other issues)

- Pressure needed to be put on the utility companies to ease off on businesses. JT said that he would flag the issue centrally. The DM said he would raise it with his UK and Devolved Administration Ministerial colleagues.

- Concern for some of the self-employed who “worked from home” and therefore were not registered and so could not claim the £10K grant i.e. tour guides.
- LA support and information varied from authority to authority – some were excellent.
- Concerns over social –distancing in the construction industry. JT said that RH was plugged into the discussions on the construction industry.
- People were still trying to come to Wales to visit. Gwynedd Council was running a PR campaign to stop it.
- Holiday homes being let as second homes continued to be a problem.
- Events like RWAS had been cancelled. RH said that he was having weekly meetings with the Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language and reiterated that Events were businesses and could access the various support measures.

(Local Authorities)

- LA Leaders were meeting Ministers regularly.
- The second home issues continued to be a big issue.
- WLGA wanted to know if any LAs were not getting funding out to those who needed it
- LAs were in a position to help on the rate relief issues with hardship funds. This issue was specific to the tourism sector and we needed to keep this message going.

2.2 JT asked that colleagues inform this group of any associations that were struggling so that help could at least be considered.

2.3 JT thanked all for taking part and said that this forum was for communicating with the sector. There group discussed making a joint statement on action to support sector which would be drafted.

2.4 It was agreed that the group would meet again next week.

Alyson Burke
6 April 2020