

Meeting (33) of Tourism Group, 10:30–11:30 Friday 8th January 2021

Participants:

Minister MH,W&WL	WG	Sean Taylor	UK TIC Rep
Deputy Minister, CST	WG	Adrian Greason-Walker	WTA
Rob Holt	WG	Dave Chapman	UK Hospitality C
Mitchel Theaker	WG	Paula Ellis	SW Forum Chair
Claire Chappell	WG	Ian Edwards	VB Board rep
Rhidian Morgan	WG	Steve Hughson	MW Forum Chair
Lucy Von Weber	WG	Philippa George	SE Forum Chair
Jo Starkey	WG	Michael Bewick	North Forum Chair
Peter Kellem	WG	Andrew Campbell	WTA
Kelly Lovell	WG	Anthony Rosser	UK Hospitality C

Apologies: Jason Thomas

Version: Final

Main points of the Meeting

At the outset of the meeting members took time to remember Emyr Griffiths, who had recently passed away and the Deputy Minister led the tributes to a legendary Welsh tourism personality. All recognised him as an incredible ambassador for Wales and noted his achievements with WTB, setting up Welsh Rarebit and the many other fantastic contributions and impacts he had made to tourism in Wales.

1. Update from Rob Holt and Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language.

RH chaired the meeting and indicated that the current public health position remained extremely challenging and the formal review, to be announced at lunchtime by the FM, had looked at potential tightening of restrictions rather than any easing. The need to reinforce the message that Wales was in lockdown and had been since pre-Christmas e.g. exercise should not involve travel to beauty spots, was emphasised. This was supported by many members who believed that ensuring compliance now was the only way to bring the numbers down and facilitate a move down the alert levels.

Both Ministers made clear how difficult the situation is with the new variant of the virus and the potential for further variants. There were significant increases in numbers in North Wales and further increases are possible in South Wales in the next few weeks. There remains confidence in the vaccine and details of the roll out plan will be announced on 11th January. This is a new unpredictable virus, a new vaccine, so planning is difficult and on that basis, Ministers' views were that it could be post-Easter before we can start looking forward confidently. RH and ST confirmed that this was in line with views of UK Tourism Ministers as outlined at this week's TIC.

2. Taskforce members points and updates:

AC said that WTA members want honesty not false hope. They want to know if the lockdown is until the end of March and would like an insight into the new thinking of WG. In this context the Minister made clear she had always tried to be as open and honest as she could be, even when the message was not what the sector wanted to hear. The alert level plan set out the criteria for moving forward related to restrictions and WG would be following that plan. Members noted that the direct, weekly, line into Ministers facilitated the clear understanding of the current position and WG thinking, something that the industry across the UK did not necessarily have.

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AC supported by all members, raised the issue of the impacts of lockdown generally with opening and closing specifically on the mental health and wellbeing of both the staff and employers in the Tourism, Hospitality and Events sector. WTA would like to work with WG to develop a survey to see the impact of this to inform the development of a strategy/support offer.

The Minister, with her Mental Health and Tourism portfolios, was acutely aware of the issue and the importance of taking action. She had spoken to the Minister for Economy and Transport and will follow this up with a list of contacts in terms of support, but had asked officials to consider what support was available whether a tailored hospitality scheme was required. LVW said this was a priority work area for her and updated the meeting on progress including the need to support owners of businesses. The key is what expert advice is available, how accessible it is and how do we get it to the sector. Members offered their support for the work, JS noted that consideration was being given to a survey but it was an extremely sensitive area. **(Action: LVW to bring a paper to meeting before end of Jan).**

SH remained extremely concerned about the position in terms of events, particularly as the alert level plan means that test events cannot resume until Level 2 and events with limited numbers in level 1, both of which seem a long way off at present. He reiterated his call for more predictive analysis. DC raised similar concerns in the context of wedding venues and the night-time economy as the future appears bleak for an early return. Both SH and DC made the case for further sector specific support, after the 1st of April is key for those sectors likely affected the longest and deepest. It was also noted that Barclays had announced they aren't providing money to the hospitality industry.

The Minister made clear that she and other Ministers were well aware of the impacts on these sectors and whilst considerable support had been given already, with the next part of the sector specific fund due to open on the 13th January, further consideration was being given to potential support going forward. Wales has made the most generous business package support across the UK as WG are aware the industry is critical to the future as a nation.

The Minister reiterated that the unpredictability of the virus, its virulence and the requirement for additional understanding of the impact of the vaccine, means predictive analysis is very difficult. RH said that the Events group would hear directly from Public Health Wales next week but at a pre-meeting, they had made clear, for example, that even when the roll out to 50+ was complete mitigations, such as 2m would be required. He went on to say the virus has the capacity to identify the most vulnerable in the under 50's and push numbers back up.

PE indicated that her forum members wanted clarity regarding the application of resources received from the UK Government e.g. the £227m announced this week and continued pressure on UKG on VAT, extending furlough etc. The DM explained how the Barnett formula worked and that WG continued to utilise any consequential against its own priorities whether NHS, vaccine roll out or the £340m sector specific support announced pre-Christmas, the first part of which, was already rolling out from LA's. RH pointed out that the £227m announced for Wales by UKG earlier in the week was not new money and was part of a previous funding announcement and the funding was already being utilised by WG. The UKG had apologised for the confusion.

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The DM confirmed that Ministers, including himself at the UK Tourism Ministers meeting, continued to lobby the UKG on key issues such as VAT, extension of Furlough beyond April and delay in repayment of CBILs etc. The FM has been able to restore joint Ministerial meetings with the UKG and that has to be replicated at other levels to work together effectively. Treasury remain the key decision makers and the next key date will be the budget on 3rd March and he is pressing for another Tourism Ministers meet ahead of that. RH confirmed that officials also continue to raise the issues but at a UK level. As ST confirmed, the issues are being raised directly with UK Ministers at TIC. The need to address leave carried over by staff on furlough was also raised at TIC.

PE also raised the issue of support for animal attractions, whilst the attractions elements had received support under ERF the animal welfare elements were still a major concern (**Action : DM agreed to seek a further meeting with Minister for Environment, Energy & Rural Affairs**).

SH, AGW, AC raised concerns about the roll out of grants to S/C in Powys. RH confirmed that this was being discussed directly with the LA. It was noted that some in the sector were of the opinion that S/C is not in the same position as large employers - who are the key employers in key communities and need to be targeted for remaining support.

IE gave his support for everything the WG have done in terms of alert levels. Agreement from members of the ignorance towards the regulations and the importance of the messaging to save the industry, economy and lives. Plea for WG to keep pushing the strong message of keeping Wales safe and stay local across all media outlets to try and avoid losing Easter and possibly only re-opening in the summer. PG strongly supported this.

Ministers confirmed they were looking at the ramping up of enforcement, as people are not adhering to the rules. LA are stricter, with an example of the supermarkets in RCT inspected all in one day.

MB raised questions around timing and expectation with the industry expecting to trade normally at Easter – is this likely, possible to identify the dates now around the review dates? Will a pan Wales approach continue?

The Minister referred again to the alert level plan and made clear the requirement is to review the regulations every 3 weeks, next review is on the 28th Jan but figures are monitored daily and changes can be made any time. The plan makes clear that regional approaches are possible but it is unlikely that we would move away from the pan Wales approach in the short term. Deputy Minister raised concerns of the continuous looking for dates. Always resisted offering hope or dates, this is a PH crisis, all we can do is keep informing the public with what we're trying to do. False hope will lead to despair.

The potential for those who had had the vaccine to carry identification was raised and the Minister explained that there isn't currently a system at the moment to prove the process of vaccination. There has been discussion however, no formal process and need to be careful around the civil liberty sensitivities around of this.

Claire Chappell updated the meeting on the progress of developing a tourism recovery plan - short, medium, and long term. Key stakeholder groups to input into this with the scenario planning and consumer confidence for the recovery of supporting businesses in post-Covid contexts. Further paper at next meeting along with a paper on statutory registration.

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Deputy Minister thanked all for the eulogies to Emyr Griffiths, and said that when the time is appropriate, should establish something to remember his name within the field of tourism – first generation of taking tourism seriously, very influential and a blessed memory in tourism.

Next meeting; 15th January 2021.

Ffion Evans-Humphreys,
11th January 2021