

Meeting (34) of Tourism Group, 10:30–11:30 Friday 15th January 2021

Participants:

Minister MH,W&WL	WG	Sean Taylor	UK TIC Rep
Deputy Minister, CST	WG	Adrian Greason-Walker	WTA
Jason Thomas	WG	Stephen Jones	WLGA
Rob Holt	WG	Dave Chapman	UK Hospitality C
Claire Chappell	WG	Paula Ellis	SW Forum Chair
Lucy Von Weber	WG	Ian Edwards	VB Board rep
Glyn Roberts	WG	Steve Hughson	MW Forum Chair
Jo Starkey	WG	Philippa George	SE Forum Chair
Claire Carew	WG	Michael Bewick	North Forum Chair
Peter Kellem	WG	Anthony Rosser	UK Hospitality C
Tara Croxton	WG		

Apologies: Andrew Campbell

Version: Final

Main points of the Meeting

1. Update from Jason Thomas.

JT chairs the meeting and welcomes all. JT discusses the logistics of the meeting, focusing on the long term planning and asked if the group were content with this. Everyone agreed, ensuring that there would be enough time for the Fora Chairs issues to be covered.

Rob Holt discusses the situation with ERF sector specific funding. £1m already offered out to the public, a credit to Business Wales for getting money out so quickly. RH states that he doesn't facilitate change at the next review, with further support being looked at and Welsh Government will continue to lobby UK Government.

RH mentions correspondence received from Carmarthen Tourism Association and points out issues that they raised. ***(Discussion with members to continue outside of this group).***

Deputy Minister discusses the importance of explaining to people how Welsh Government works. DM discusses the Consequential Barnett and spends by the UK and devolved administrations. He continues to explain how WG are responsible for own priorities within the framework and notes importance to show how the money has been repurposed in this crisis.

2. Taskforce members points and updates:

-Members asked if there was further updates on state aid rules?

Official confirms that post 1st January issues are still on going and a temporary fix will be confirmed this week and mentions that all available funding has been repurposed into ERF & CRF. No additional money is there to support individual businesses.

-The group explained that they had been made aware, large amount of money hasn't been repurposed within the RDP under spends. They mentioned that the money should be used for the purpose that it was given to support the rural communities which accounts to 90% of Wales.

Official confirms that European funding will include all sorts of rules around RDP, and EU funding is already being looked at.

Meeting (34) of Tourism Group, 10:30–11:30 Friday 15th January 2021

-Members require evidence of WG lobbying UKG and want the information shared to the industry. They require assurances that the consequential funds are going to support businesses of those severely affected and not supporting other WG projects. Discussion around the importance of the constructive dialogue between WG and Westminster.

Official stated that the Minister, Deputy Minister and others senior officials are representing in forums at UK level. Sean Taylor said he is happy to reiterate the statements on furlough, business rates and VAT if there is a valid question, and will put them forward to the UK Tourism Council (**Action**).

-Issues raised of concerns around repayment of loans into the new financial year, which could be an offset to a serious position and an appeal for further support that will progress past January 22nd.

Officials confirm that this has been raised at UKG level and discusses the 3rd supplementary budget in February/March were the Finance Minister looks at everything and potential packages needed.

Discussion around re-opening, don't want to see different parts of the UK opening at different rates as it creates unbalanced competition. Need clearer messages to target markets, particularly over the border.

The issue from last week's meeting is reiterated in relation to Local Authorities with Non-Domestic issues and stresses importance of pursuing this. The DM said that he is happy to discuss the issue with Minister for Housing and Local Government (**Action**).

3. Statutory Registration

Rob Holt introduces Glyn Roberts who presented a paper to discuss Statutory Registration with the group. This effectively is a heads up that the WG are looking into this in detail as an advance notice prior to a consultation.

The group raised the following points:

- Suggestions of a joined up approach with the other nations.
- Ensuring the language is appropriate around the sensitivity e.g. many members were concerned that this will lead to Tourism Tax.
- Difference of views on how the scheme would be administered - National vs Local Authorities. With the main concerns around the challenges of administering.
- Clear there are issues to be resolved on fee structures and for it to be appropriate for Welsh businesses.
- Positivity that this could hopefully, correct the issues with Airbnb.
- Discussion on the interpretation and differences between second homes vs holiday accommodation.
- Suggestion for Ministers not to rush into this and consider all opinions e.g. local people, tourism business, capitals, councils and look at the long-term issue.

Officials discussed that Northern Ireland has the scheme already in place, Scotland are going down this route and some authorities in England are considering. WG are looking into this and shouldn't be seen as an inevitability.

Meeting (34) of Tourism Group, 10:30–11:30 Friday 15th January 2021

4. Free Grading

GR discusses free grading with the group, which has been on the agenda since 2019, with Covid-19 taking focus to other things and was re-looked at in autumn last year. Wanted views from the group in terms of discussing arrangements to introduce in the next few months.

The group raised the following points:

- Free grading is welcomed by the group, taking into consideration the situation of AA, and the importance of good quality certified accommodation.
- Queries around the relevance of grading currently with people basing decisions on social media and how the resources in WG would be better spent in other forms.
- Members see this as an opportunity for VW to gather information in preparation for Tourism Tax.
- Opportunity to change the concept of grading to an industry information system as a mechanism of bringing Visit Wales, Business Wales, mental health and opportunity for wider information as a business support package.
- Consensus view to get rid of the concept of inspector, the fear of analysing the business is emotionally criticising with a shift of creating an emotional support package. Continued support towards the benefit of educating owners and a way of managing and improving the business in an effective way.
- Discussion around the star system with the arguments of the schemes e.g. guesthouses vs hotels. Important to be aware of the issues around owners changing business name and benefiting from this. Highly misleading to the public when they require specific stars and is a fundamental change to ensure consistency across the board.

Officials outlined plans for conducting a review of the tourism action plan in light of Covid-19.

5. Events update

Rob Holt explains how events is a massive part of the Visitor Economy, had a specific events meeting with PH colleagues this week and messaging isn't positive. As reiterated previously around the alerts level, mitigations will be in place as long as the virus is around. Massive implications for events with decisions for the summer and autumn.

-Importance of focusing longer term as short term is very difficult. Made the case on difficulties around test events and request for sector specific funding. Concerns around what's happening in England. DCMS approach is more positive around likely-hood of events starting. This has a huge impact on Wales with enquiries for events going elsewhere and creates fear of not getting further CRF support if events continue to progress in England.

Officials discuss that this is not the interpretation from UK Tourism Council and will discuss with counterparts on this **(Action)**.

The Deputy Minister discusses that he relies completely on the advice of Dr Frank Atherton and that the PH context is clear. Obligation to look after the people of Wales on the decisions we jointly make as Welsh Ministers and have responsibility to follow through. Pleads with people not to talk down the PH message.

-Jessica Morden MP is now a voice for Wales as a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the events industry after discussions with Ian Edwards. The group has no official

Meeting (34) of Tourism Group, 10:30–11:30 Friday 15th January 2021

status in Parliament but can influence what happens, important to carry on with this to help financial aid.

6. Further Update from sector

Concerns of the Welsh nation going through the pain of election during the pandemic provides great concern of not postponing within the time of a global emergency. The concept of the political manoeuvring with the May election has the potential of moving the ability of focusing on the pandemic.

Officials reassures the members that even during a pre-election period the Government will always operate. The Government will be there to respond to the crisis. Discussion continues on communication with the election, which potentially could provide issues. Trying to seek guidance around this internally, in relation to moving through the alert levels and informing the industry.

7. Strawman Tourism Recovery Plan

Claire Chappell shares a power point on the Strawman Tourism Recovery Plan. Developed practical actions to discuss with the groups on 6 key themes. Will be returning to this in the next Tourism Taskforce meeting to discuss further after the group reviews and provides comments (***Action for group members***).

Discussion on the work across the boundaries and the statement that the Economy Minister made around the 5 beacon strategy. Suggestion of lobbying to get into the top 5, to lead the way instead of being looked like a secondary economy. In addition, the group discuss the APPG hospitality group for Wales from 2019 and the opportunity to reactivate this after Covid.

8. Next meeting;

Jason Thomas mentions there is no prediction of a relaxation in the review next week and proposes a meeting on the 29th January 2021. Reassemble and return to Claire's item on the agenda. Rob Holt thanks LA for the money being turned out so quickly to the industry and supporting WG.

Ffion Evans-Humphreys
21st January 2021.