

Meeting (39) of Tourism Group – 10:30-12:30, Friday 5th March 2021

Participants:

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

Apologies; Steven Jones

Version - Final

Main Points of the meeting

1. Welcome

Jason Thomas starts the meeting with optimism, discussing the UK Governments (UKG) budget announcement and the written statement that the Finance Minister (FM) issued around business rates for Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure. This is a big relief to the industry and the stakeholders were appreciative and thanked Welsh Government (WG) for pushing this through.

2. 21 Day Review

Discussion around the lead up to the 21-day review with ongoing meetings on number of options between FM and Ministers, the issue around the road map and dates isn't going to change. Many different views as Local Authorities (LA) and Police have concerns from last weekend, however starting the process is vital, which means WG wouldn't align with England. Public Health (PH) has concerns on how the sector is going to manage only one household and no English businesses and will be a problem if accommodation is taking bookings from outside of Wales. Going to be easy for the media to pick up on this with undercover reporters and don't want the good-will diminished as the FM backed the sector as being responsible as they did a brilliant job last year.

Deputy Minister (DM) discusses the positive actions from Cabinet and the willingness from colleagues to listen to the evidence from the sector with the essential balance of Public Health (PH). On that basis, the decision is to open tourism gradually after schools. Need to maintain the trust, and for tourism to remain at the top of the agenda with WG following the pandemic.

3. Comments by the Stakeholders

- Discussion around the media as The Sunday Times are already asking questions in relation to the 12th April in England and Wales.
- Clarification is needed to understand when self-contained accommodation opens will it be pan Wales? Stakeholders mention that this is still a challenge, with concerns how much business this would attract? Willing for customers in Wales to pay £150 a night for a room and essentially they can't do anything.

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- Difficulties around writing cash flow processes for banks. They need to know how they can support the businesses going forward, impossible to do that without knowing what's going on, waiting for the 21 day review isn't good enough.

Discussion on state aid and officials confirm that it's still not clear and they are looking for clarity with colleagues. SSF 2 opens next week and LA are set up to for the Micros. RH explains the process of looking at further funding after 1st April e.g. SSF 3 & CRF 2.

Stakeholders emphasised that support from WG has to continue substantially post April 1st appealing for CRF 2.

- Disappointment that attractions aren't opening the same time as self-contained accommodation. This only benefits the local supermarkets as the tourists won't have anything to do except go to the food retailers - creates a DMO issue.
- Counter parts in England are opening on the 29th March. Go Ape are opening all sites and the stakeholders explains that this puts Wales at a massive disadvantage. As a result, this will change people's behaviour going to the Lake District instead of coming to Wales.

Lucy Von Weber (LVW) confirms that she has been on calls with representatives in England and there is no indication that this will be allowed. Lake District will be working on reassuring communities for the next month. Will take this up with the head of DMO's and comms (**Action- LVW**).

- Stakeholders expressed excitement at the potential of reopening the visitor economy.
- There is a trust fracture with the sector and people are struggling to understand where WG are coming from around the processes.
- It was reiterated by Stakeholders that comms of the next phase is critical and how this group has a role in helping. Possibly Wales will be open earlier than England. Need to translate this delivery and give confidence to the industry for the opportunities ahead.

Deputy Minister mentions the opportunity to tackle community attitude. Hearing messages of areas being extremely negative.

Claire Chappell mentions the comms around the FM announcement and how Visit Wales (VW) will launch a high profile behavioural campaign with Addo reassuring communities. CC highlights the challenges and importance to work together to get the messages out, currently looking at physical packs that could be distributed through DMO partners to provide visibility in Wales. Will update at the next meeting (**Action**). RH discusses that Scotland have been in touch and they are adapting the Addo campaign to their equivalent.

- The road map is touched upon as people are influenced by social media and radio. Stakeholders are inundated with feedback that businesses don't know where they stand due to the lack of comms. Hospitality business feels like WG isn't being so proactive as English counter parts, giving trading advantage. South West Wales usually had 80% business from Wales before Covid-19.

Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing & Welsh Language (MfMH,W&WL) emphasised that they have always made clear that education was the priority and discusses the return to schools. Minister reiterates that there is a road map in England, however, doubts they will

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be able to adhere to it. Minister states she will continue to make the case in Cabinet and give you as much warning. Have to recognise a slow phase instead of a brutal re-opening for communities to get back to normal and explains the different infection rates in areas.

Deputy Minister discusses that they shouldn't take the lack of messaging for not preparedness and that it's difficult to provide messages that may mislead businesses. That would be more disastrous than communicating when ready to do so, emphasising the trust issue goes both way.

- Questions on indication to border monitoring and the approach, Stakeholders have been challenged on a couple of occasions that it's guidance not law. Businesses are looking at Addo as a way of telling a story to customers. Feedback from the community is positive to try and encourage guest on how to behave.
- Concerns the industry and small operators will take the brunt of any breach during the gap between Wales opening and when the English people can visit.

Official discusses that WG will write to Chief Executives of all Online Travel Agencies (OTA) to make it clear that it's not acceptable taking bookings over that period, currently setting up meetings with Airbnb.

- Discussion on the Mental Health issues around productivity issues coming out of lockdown.
- Details on overcharging culture discussed. This is happening in Wales and is sending a bad message - should pre-empt the agencies that aren't moving their prices, which could help the brand image.
- Discussion on social distancing, if this is going to be re-visited for businesses to be more viable at 1 meter.
- In the UK Tier meeting yesterday, Nigel Huddleston MP made a comment that we should be grateful and acknowledge all the good work by respective governments.

RH discusses the work streams announced at UK level e.g. Global Travel Taskforce (GTT), research on lateral flow testing and vaccine certificates. The WG position following discussions with PH colleagues remain, no movement away from 2 meter for the foreseeable future. CC discusses that the cash flow issue of overcharging is a specific intervention in the recovery plan.

- Frustration of the control plan to be re-launched. Focus on 3 weekly announcement, some businesses need a long term approach, in danger of being drowned out by PM Boris Johnson MP narrative as it's seen as positive. It was also discussed that people need time to plan e.g. safety issues.
- Acknowledge the delivery of the vaccinations giving comfort to the communities.
- Clarification on the grant was welcomed, as members have been disappointed and confused at the next round of grants for the small businesses who don't employ over 10 people.

MfMH,W&WL discusses the major issues with the funding as significant support has been provided to the industry already compared to retail and WG are going to be audited at some point. The Minister discussed that NDR seemed liked the better route to get money through the door before the end of financial year. RH mentions that the Minister lobbied hard for support for the smaller businesses as there wasn't going to be additional support and intervened personally for another round of NDR.

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4. Vaccination Passport

RH discusses the considerations on UKG level and WG level. Different arguments around the logistics with ethical issues etc. Inevitable countries will bring the requirements for the vaccine certificate which will drive the process. Individual businesses have the ability to put own rules into place and need to look at the WG role in that. CC said that the GTT are asking for reps from the sector to feed back to the group views on the future vaccination process (**Action - group**). RH continues discussing the complexity of this with mitigations and quarantine.

- Stakeholders expressed different views in the industry of the vaccination passport with some arguing against this as it step over a line and others encouraging it.
- Lateral flow in premises was discussed with managing events, which is another piece of technical opportunity but needs managing.

MfMH,W&WL states that a report was published this week commissioned by WG, Morgan Academy and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol on second homes in Wales and suggests a future meeting to look at the issues within a tourism context (**Action**). Minister continues by addressing the fact that Vaccination Passports shouldn't be introduced until everyone has been offered the vaccine. RH mentions that statutory registration scheme didn't get through in Scotland and NI have just reviewed theirs. He emphasised the importance to learn lessons from colleagues and confirmed that WG are still committed to free grading from the 1st of April 2021.

5. Executive Summary of the feedback on the 8 Recovery Plan themes

CC discusses the headline topics areas of the recovery plan, which ties in to the reopening of the sector and states that VW came into 2020 with a good foundation with the Tourism Action Plan. LVW discusses the feedback from the regional forums.

6. AOB

- Question around a September bank holiday as there are talks of one in England? It was discussed as a good time to motivate people to visit destinations.
- In relation to the re-opening, to look at wider services with closed residential hotels if possible to offer social distanced facilities.

Officials confirm in relation to the bank holiday that it's legislation made by the Queen as she introduces the decisions.

Deputy Minister closes the meeting by stating this is an intelligent approach for the future of Tourism, always believe high intellectual quality of the industry and delighted by the quality of the proposals today.

7. Next meeting - 12th March 2021

Ffion Evans-Humphreys
9th March 2021