

## Visit Wales - South East Wales Regional Tourism Forum

28 May 2020 – Virtual Meeting (online)

<b>List of attendees representing the following organisations:</b>
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport & Tourism
Heritage Tourism & Events Ltd (Chair)
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
The Great House Llantwit
Bridgend County Borough Council
Vale Resort
Cardiff Council
Monmouthshire County Council
Wye Valley AONB
Coleg y Cymoedd
Cardiff Hoteliers
Cardiff Council
Celtic Manor
The Royal Mint Experience
ICC Wales
Wales Activity Tourism Organisation
Town & County Collective
Rhondda Cynon Taff Council
Welsh Water
Newport City Council
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Monmouthshire Council
Aneurin Leisure Trust
Penderyn Whisky
Caerphilly Council
Rock UK
Severn hills Hideaway
National Trust
RSPB
Porthcawl Surf School
Angel Hotel, Abergavenny
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Wye Valley AONB
Visit Wales representatives
<b>Apologies</b>
Parkway Hotel & Spa
Merthyr Tydfil Council
Wales Millennium Centre

## **Welcome & Introductions – Philippa George**

Chair welcomed all members and Deputy Minister thanking them for taking the time out to attend the Regional Forum.

## **Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport & Tourism address**

Deputy Minister updated members on the work he had been carrying out alongside the First Minister to support the tourism industry. Thanking the sector and public for heeding the messages to stay at home and maintain social distancing. Deputy Minister remarked on how impressed he has been with the professional way the industry had raised their concerns and how they working together on a joint guidelines a new UK wide standard.

## **Jason Thomas – Director Culture, Sport & Tourism**

JT provided a quick update on packages of support provided by the Welsh Government and updated members on the wider Welsh Government work currently on going to support businesses during the recovery phase.

JT said that he was encouraged by the feed in from the industry via the Forum Chair, to the COVID-19 meetings discussions and reassured members that WG are aware of the issues and pressures facing businesses. He also reassured members that he is aware that these issues will not go away when lockdown is lifted and WG will continue to work closely with industry to overcome any issues including lobbying the UK Government on longer term funding, VAT reductions etc.

## **Research – Jo Corke**

JC advised on the three key areas that are currently; informing Welsh Government response, informing support for the sector and understand / influencing individuals' choices surrounding consumer plans, ideas and appetites for risk.

## **Funding / Grant Support – Rhidian Morgan**

RM gave an overview of the second round of Economic Resilience Fund (ERF) announced by Economy Minister, Ken Skates last week. RM encouraged members to share this information throughout their networks and for businesses to apply based on eligibility rules criteria.

RM informed members that WG understands that businesses see the need to move quickly. However, WG staff are ensuring that ERF Phase 1 is complete before opening Phase 2. All information on the scheme announcement will be included in VW newsletters.

RM updated members that Tourism Investment Support Scheme is closed and has been for several months. It has been replaced with Wales Tourism Investment Fund (WTIF) via Development Bank for Wales. WTIF has a pipeline of projects that would allocate the remainder of the budget and therefore, VW are no longer looking for interested parties to apply.

Micro Small Business Fund Award of Funding letters have been honoured however; the scheme is no longer accepting EOI's or applications. RM informed members that capital fund budgets have been repurposed under the wider ERF scheme to support tourism businesses more effectively.

Deputy Minister added that by repurposing the existing tourism funds was seen to have more benefit to tourism businesses in the long term rather than set up a separate tourism COVID-19 fund.

RM stated that officials are looking into new funding schemes via RDP / ERDF and WG funds to support tourism business going forward following the end of lockdown period.

### **Rob Holt – Tourism Policy**

RH advised members of bookings regulations and advised to refer to [FAQ](#) for further guidance.

RH advised members that Industry Guidance been produced by UK Hospitality (Cymru) and the Wales Tourism Alliance to provide best practice guidance for working safely in the visitor economy/tourism sector in Wales in preparation for any lifting of restrictions. VW will be running webinars within the next few weeks for interested members. Invite and information to follow. The guidelines will allow businesses to complete risk assessments demonstrating that they are compliant, giving customers confidence in their booking.

RH updated members on VW grading scheme in that there would be no extension to grading membership, as the scheme will free of charge from next April. Officials are currently reviewing the refund options and information will be circulated once an agreement has been made.

Group accommodation queries were raised whereby RH suggested business refer to the Industry Guidance around cleanliness, hygiene and social distancing once published and that understands the challenge.

Deputy Minister reinforced the message that all the decisions made in Wales use Public Health Wales advice as the basis. The underlining factor is that until Wales is a safe place to visit and communities are happy, we will not advise visitors to come to Wales if it is not safe.

RH updated members on events which is the biggest concern for the sector. Guidance is being produced and when this is available it will be shared with sector via VW newsletters.

Chair raised concerns over large bookings at campsites. JT noted an important point that with regulatory changes, the public need to obey these rules and they have a duty to adhere. If customers abuse the guidance, WG might then be forced to make amendments with stricter consequences.

### **Lucy Von Weber – Marketing**

LvW gave an update to members on Visit Wales Marketing with the context behind current planning and thoughts on future core messages. She thanked partners for strengthening and complementing the 'Visit Wales. Later' message via their digital and social media channels.

Chair added that VW message has only strengthen what actions businesses have been taking and it has been very useful.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Minister for his time and support for the industry and the information from the presenters, which was invaluable.

The Chair asked members to send in any information or issues that can be raised on behalf of the region at COVID-19 Tourism meetings by Thursdays each week.

**Date of next meeting:** 01 July 2020