



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

South East Wales Regional Tourism Forum

20 September 2022

Minutes

Attendees

Chair – **Fiona Wilton** (Monmouthshire Cottages), **Steffan Roberts**, **Lucy Von Weber & Rebecca Rees** (Visit Wales), **Sally Walters** (Dwr Cymru), **Adrian Cole** (Caerphilly Tourism Association), **Lyndsey Handley** (Merthyr Tydfil Council), **Julie Heaven** (Aneurin Leisure), **Rachel Cilliers** (Rock UK), **Antony Bolter** (Caerphilly CBC), **Nia Hollins** (Vale of Glamorgan Council), **Alyson Tippings** (Blaenau Gwent CBC), **Nicola Edwards** (Monmouthshire Council), **Lynne Richards** (Newport Council), **Faye Tanner** (Cardiff Council), **Jo Nugent** (Angel Hotel)

Dialling in

Julie Osmond (Visit Wales), **Sarah Higgs** (Parkway Hotel), **Jay Tyler & Martyn Gunter** (Welsh Government), **Glyn Roberts & Gwawr Price** (Visit Wales), **Paul Williams** (Celtic Manor), **Paul Brandwood** (Royal Mint), **Nerys Royal** (RCTCBC), **Julian Hitchcock** (Town and Country Collective)

Apologies

Gaynor Thomas (Cardiff Council), **Ian Christopher** (RCTCBC), **Mari Lowe** (Valleys Regional Park), **Karen Matthews** (Exi Cardiff), **Claire Hamer** (Museums Wales), **Tim Howell** (Parkdean Resorts), **Paul Rees** (College Cymoedd), **Amy Doore** (RSPB), **Stephen Leeke** (Leekes), **Paul Donovan** (Escape Routes), **Martin Astley** (Bike Park Wales), **Lynfa Protheroe**, **Lyndsey Handley & Mike Parry** (Merthyr Tydfil Council), **Phill Sykes & Julie Heaven** (Aneurin Leisure), **Kim Waters** (Abergavenny Food Festival), **Stephen Davies** (Penderyn distillery)

1. Welcome & Introduction from Chair

- 1.1 FW welcomed attendees and noted how positive it is that meetings are now taking place in person; however, it was hoped more would have attended.
- 1.2 SR explained that the four Fora chairs are now meeting regularly to discuss common issues pan Wales. The Terms of Reference (TOR) are still under review. Fora members had sent comments through to the Chair which have been compiled and sent back through to Welsh Government. Welsh Government are reviewing the comments and a final version will be shortly circulated to members. Non-domestic rates (NDR) is also being discussed with the Chairs and FW highlighted an example of a local business that had been sent a letter by the Valuation Office Agency, so attendees might hear of self-catering businesses within their areas that might receive such a letter. The pandemic years are even considered in the timeframe of the letter. SR confirmed a query had been received by the Wales Tourism Association on this matter and this had been forwarded to the relevant policy team within Welsh Government.

2. Reform of the School Year agenda

2.1 JT said the Reform of the School year policy will have a formal consultation during this academic year and the team are now gathering views, recognising the impact this policy has on the Tourism sector. There are two different strands to this work, which is being addressed to shorten the gap in disadvantage in learners, one was to explore reform of the school day and the other the school year. Looking at where school holidays currently sit and whether there is a benefit in moving these. Could producing a consistent framework of school holidays pan Wales be beneficial, rather than leaving this decision to Local Authorities. JT ran through a slide deck which is circulated with the minutes. **Action: RR**

2.2 Members of the Forum said they saw benefit in a set structure for Wales. Further comments were made around:

- Attractions working with schools during term time but individuals during holidays. Attractions aren't able to cater for English schools when working with Welsh schools. There is a set structure in Scotland and the outdoor centre there has difficulty with individual bookings.
- Weather impact; as not every week generates the same impact. For example, the warmer weather sees more tourists and Wales has a lot of outdoor attractions.
- The clock changing also impacts attractions – particularly where Easter falls.
- Have private schools been considered and their model looked at. FW said there are longer days in private schools but the way this is patterned is different.
- Big attractions will be anxious if the demand for visits is less concentrated on certain days as the cost of opening for the day won't break even. There could also be difficulty in getting support staff for a very short space in time.
- This could mean difficulty for cross border Authorities;
- Having Easter separate from the school holidays will impact on personal leave requirements. This will also be the same for Christmas leave and attractions may not want to open if the demand isn't there. MG said this is a strong point that has been fed back in the report undertaken by Beaufort Research 'Attitudes towards school year reform in Wales'. He added given the feedback received on this, it is unlikely the Christmas break will be extended.
- This reduces the window of opportunity to take breaks – especially during winter weather. Pressure on businesses where staff all want to take holidays during the same time. Reducing summer break will have an impact on tourism. Negative impact on families by having longer winter breaks. MG said this was another valid point that was echoed in Beaufort Research's report.
- There were queries around England's plans. MG said no formal plans have been made by UK Government but there is work taking place on this. Scotland have undertaken their changes already.

2.3 The consultation will be issued close to the end of this academic year with any changes introduced for the academic year starting September 2024 or 2025. A decision could be made in September 2023 but there would be a grace period before implementation. MG said any further feedback will be welcomed and the team were happy to discuss on an individual or group basis. Any further thoughts to be sent through to the team: ExploringUseOfSchoolTime@gov.wales

3. Tourism Levy

3.1 FW explained that the four Fora chairs agreed to write to the Chief Executives of the Local Authorities to get clarification around two issues facing the sector – the 182 day NDR and Tourism Levy. Answers have been received from Merthyr Tydfil, Vale of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire Council on plans for implementing these changes. Updates were received from those present:

- Newport Council has prepared a response but this hadn't been sent yet as the CEO has been away. No decision has been made, as further work needed to be undertaken and the Council will be participating in the Ministerial engagement event planned for the South East. The understanding is that the impact on trade will be difficult right now.
- Monmouthshire Council, being a border Authority, are in a difficult position as unless this is adopted in England the businesses on the Welsh side of the border will be impacted. It appears to be a standard rate for the levy which won't address the seasonality of the region, for example different rates in different times of the year. It will only make the day visitor situation worse if this is a bed tax.
- Caerphilly Council said that on the assumption of this being a bed stock tax there isn't the provision in the borough. Assuming this is a 'light touch tax' but the set up and running of the levy collection will not be covered by the fees collected.
- Blaenau Gwent said the workshops for this were in depth and well thought out and the consultation exercises great. There is little appetite for the Tourism Levy at present in the Local Authority and there is too little information to gather an opinion on this just yet. If there are only a few Authorities collecting the Levy we won't see much impact on Tourism yet but if its larger it will be a different story. It will be discussed at the Destination Management Group meeting next month and we will then respond to the consultation. A voluntary levy was applied in the Valley's Regional Park but this never got off the ground, there needs to be an imposed Levy for it to have any kind of impact
- Cardiff Council said there is no decision yet and the Cabinet are meeting to discuss.

3.2 SR said it is probably too early to determine a firm position on Tourism Levy as the consultation has only been issued today with the full detail of what this will entail now available. The policy team working on this are keen to hear views from stakeholders. Following the consultation, Welsh Government will formulate plans and then each Local Authority area will need to take a view on whether this will be adopted in their region. Alongside the consultation there will be Ministerial led events with the South East taking place on 5 October. LVW added the documents were all now online. In recent conversations Scotland plan to bring forward their city tax in the next year and at a recent meeting in Belfast there was a similar discussion. The points raised in this discussion should be highlighted in your response to the consultation.

3.3 As Chair, FW has been sent recent responses from Local Authorities across Wales and some Authorities have explicitly said they won't adopt the Levy and others say they want it but are worried about the process for collecting the Levy and its impact.

It will be hard to count visitors so should this be considered a bed stock tax? The problem of over tourism is caused by day visitors, with pictures of Snowden evidencing this. How to tax those individuals will be a problem without applying this tax to the local population. These points should all be considered whilst compiling your response to the consultation. FW said the PR wasn't looking great and neighbouring counties are taking advantage of the bad press.

- 3.4 RC queried what would be taxed, as day visitors from neighbouring English Authorities will go elsewhere. If this is adopted on a UK wide basis it would make sense but this would isolate Wales.
- 3.5 FW queried thought on the NDR order. Some answers received from the three Local Authorities that had replied indicated that it is the Valuation Office Agencies responsibility to find who will be implicated by this. FW queried if any Local Authority was looking for under the radar operators.
- 3.6 Blaenau Gwent said this conversation hasn't yet started with the finance department but regular bed stock surveys are taking place. Airbnb posed a problem, unless there is a picture of outside the property by which they could be found. BG were 95% sure what bed stock they held. LVW said Airbnb are very good at updating their bed stock and sharing information with Governments.
- 3.7 In the Vale of Glamorgan the valuation and finance teams are meeting to discuss this. Again, regular bed stock surveys are taking place but with a fluctuating two years it has been hard to keep track. Statutory Licensing will underpin everything we do and is important now more than ever.
- 3.8 Merthyr Tydfil have undertaken research and identified 31 self-catering properties, with 32 listed on the Council's website. However, they are aware of 94 suppliers on Airbnb so there is a big gap. If Statutory Licensing is adopted this will massively help.

4. Visit Wales update

- 4.1 SR said this was the first day back for Senedd business due to a delay last with recent events surrounding the mourning period following the Queen's death. These discussions are very important to Welsh Government, as it's a two-way process for WG to share info and to gather feedback. Messages from this Forum will be taken forward to tomorrow's Visitor Economy Forum with the Minister.
- 4.2 GR gave a presentation on the Statutory Licensing scheme. The Policy team are now engaging with stakeholders and will go out for a formal consultation later this year. An email will be sent to forum members to gather initial feedback following the meeting.
- 4.3 The following points were made:

- Who would pay for this? GR said this is something that needed to be looked into and will depend whether there is an inspection regime or whether it will look at complaints. This will all be covered in the consultation;
- What is happening in England? GR said UK Government are only now doing a call for evidence but if there are opportunities to align every effort will be made to do so. Currently, the timescales don't match;
- Alignment with a business's Health and Safety requirements. GR said whether requiring a business to upload this information is what we should do will be another point covered in the consultation. Some online travel agents have a tick box scheme;
- Have the planning aspects been considered? GR confirmed it has and if the business has all these things in place it should be a straightforward process;
- Would there be issues with businesses that have existed from a number of years? For example, applying for this 25 years ago and having a letter to say planning permission wasn't needed. GR said this was something the team were awaiting feedback from planning colleagues on.
- Timing? Is there a case for fast forwarding this? GR said this is aligned to the Visitor levy which is currently out for consultation,;
- The outdoor sector is heavily regulated, so it would be nice to see legislation tied in together otherwise the costs could be quite substantial. GR acknowledged this was a good point but didn't think there is a central register yet.

Events

4.4 JO explained that in July, Visit Wales launched a new events strategy for Wales. The strategy is based around three key themes:

- Align the industry. To be resilient and prosperous the industry will develop a strong voice that ensures all stakeholders are aligned and working in collaboration towards common outcomes;
- Authenticity. Events in Wales will have a distinct 'Welshness' regardless of size, scale, or location. This will include the Welsh language, reflect the Cymru Wales Brand, and the Well-being Act criteria;
- All of Wales. Our industry will maximise existing assets, spread its events across Wales and across the year and aim to achieve equality, diversity, and inclusion.

4.5 Since strategy launch a new events advisory group has been established to oversee the implementation plan and is chaired by Steve Hughson, Chair of the Mid Wales Regional Forum. This will also strengthen the link to the wider visitor economy. The budget for each year is allocated quite far in advance but anything from 2023/24 onwards the team are always happy to discuss. There is ringfenced funding for sector development and additional funding for environmental work. There is a steady pipeline of projects for the next few years. The team can be contacted on: EventWales@gov.wales

Marketing

4.6 LVW gave an update on some of the key pieces of activity taking place over the next few weeks. Croeso activity was still running from June to August and Addo also ran during the school holidays. There is a new Visit Wales Advertorial out and LVW demo' d this to the Forum. Visit Wales are moving to all year round advertising. Similar to last year, on 13 October another online session will be held and LVW encouraged members to register. The audience identity kit will be presented and the registration link will be in this week's Industry bulletin.

- 4.7 VW had produced an information note around the five key ways for engaging with the teams on things such as grading and use of the free asset site.
- 4.8 VW had worked with the National Parks on a Diolch campaign and Wales Coast Path on promotion work around the ten year anniversary. Work is also building around the World Cup.
- 4.9 LvW pointed towards other key resources including Consumer Insights – latest research, new content creation for the website, the travel trade programme and working with Rough guides.
- 4.10 The latest year of was announced as the ‘Year of Trails’ and in line with Visit Wales strategy there will be a break of a year to allow a year lead in before the next ‘Year of’. Members of the Forum welcomed the Year of Trails and said it was very inclusive, as all sectors can capitalise on this on so many different levels. Further information will be available in October’s webinar.
- 4.11 LVW acknowledged the recent documentary on Wrexham Football club and the great coverage this was bringing to Wales. The team were sponsored by Expedia and Visit Wales are working with Expedia for EU and the USA markets.

5. Sector updates / AOB

- 5.1 A number of sector updates have been received in written format and will be circulated after the meeting. The Chair asked for any Wales wide updates to be brought to the attention of the Forum.
- 5.2 FW concluded the meeting by thanking attendees for their input and reminding attendees they were advocates for their sector, so messages should be taken back from today and to bring forward thoughts from stakeholders. Messages from today will be taken forward to tomorrow’s Visitor Economy Forum.
- 5.3 SH thanked Ed Ryan who had recently moved to another role in Welsh Government and welcomed RR as the new Regional Engagement Manager for the South East region.
- 5.4 The next meeting will take place on 29 November virtually and members are asked to volunteer meeting venues for the first meeting of 2023.