

Meeting (6) of Tourism Group – 10:30am, Friday, 1 May 2020

Participants:

Deputy Minister, CST	WG	Stephen Jones	WLGA
Jason Thomas - Director	WG	Paula Ellis	SW Forum Chair
Rob Holt	WG	Phillipa George	SE Forum Chair
Rhidian Morgan	WG	Sean Taylor	UK TIC Rep
Lucy von Weber	WG	Anthony Rosser	UK Hospitality C
Mari Stevens	WG	Dave Chapman	UK Hospitality C
Ian Edwards	VB Board rep	Michael Bewick	North Forum Chair
Andrew Campbell	WTA	Steve Hughson	MW Forum Chair
Adrian Greason-Walker	WTA	Jo Corke	WG

Version: FINAL

Main points of meeting

1. Update – Jason Thomas

The Deputy Minister and Jason Thomas welcomed all and thanked the group members for their invaluable contribution to the effort to protect the tourism, hospitality and events sector in Wales. JT updated as follows:

-Another busy week with discussion turning to potential easing of restrictions. The virtual meeting with representatives from all of the sectors which make up the Culture, Sport and Tourism portfolio on 30 April had been incredibly useful. Clear themes had emerged and some good ideas around what might emerge from lockdown first. However, financial worries continued in some quarters and there was a call for the extension of the furlough arrangements.

- The DM commented that in his 2½ years as Deputy Minister the 30 April meeting had been the first time that all areas of his portfolio had met altogether. It had been a joy to see the sense of community and proper public service.

-MS was co-ordinating the CST response to the unwinding of restrictions against the backdrop of the FM's 7 tests, which would be feeding into his review of the next steps for Wales. MS fed back on the detail of what areas needed to be covered, short term and longer term ideas and considerations. MS reminded all to get their additional comments back to her by 5 May.

-A discussion followed about what would a relaxation of the restrictions mean for the Tourism/events sector, if it were to be the case. SJ said PPE would be required if working with the public. It was thought possible that with the correct protocols in place there were a selection of activities that could, feasibly be considered for reopening. Clear regulations and guidance needed to be in place before reopening.

2. Updates from Sector Representatives

Members spoke to the written updates they had provided for the meeting.

North Wales Region - Michael Bewick - main comments were:

-Needed to consider how to manage the inevitable flurry of visitors

-Guidance needed to be consistent especially if it there were cross-border differences in policy

-Messaging needed to be clear, many wanted to be involved in development of the messaging.

-The Holiday lets issues had eased, though there were still reports of some people not being able to access funding. JT acknowledged RH's efforts for tourism businesses around business rate relief and was pleased it had paid off.

South East Region – Phillipa George - main comments were:

-some potential closure of small businesses in the region; a working group had been set up on that and PG would feed the information to RH.

Meeting (6) of Tourism Group – 10:30am, Friday, 1 May 2020

- PG said (and all agreed) that IE's draft plans for reopening were most valuable (and the more notice of reopening the better, with agreed, consistent policies).
- RH reported that the Counsel General was leading on the financial recovery work and had found the input from the tourism sector on gaps invaluable.

South West Region – Paula Ellis - main comments were:

- PE had sent extensive feedback from the region on insurance to VW for consideration.
- JT asked all to send specific examples about utility companies' behaviour too
- Had attended St David's Tourism Association meeting where people were feeling the strain and worried about the recovery period and had to choose between staying safe and staying solvent.
- Still concern at the prospect of a second wave, and if that did happen, funding would need to be ringfenced.
- There was a discussion about the furlough rules around annual leave. The position is that statutory annual leave can be rolled over for up to 2 years if it cannot be taken because of the current situation.

Mid Wales Region - Steve Hughson - main comments were:

- Lifting restrictions would not be easy; public were fearful and there needed to be consistency across the UK otherwise there would be confusion and breaches and a second spike of the virus.
- still issues around funding gaps, rates and events were hardest hit. RH noted the concerns around the new eligibility criteria for self-catering businesses and said LAs had discretion in applying them and bona fide s/c businesses should apply with the information they had.
- suggested that if areas of the industry reopen then furlough should be removed for those who can open.
- SH added that it appeared that events would be the last "sector" to come out of lockdown. Huge loss of revenue for Wales in the region of £40-50 million a year from the Royal Welsh Show not going ahead.

Wales Tourism Alliance – Adrian Greason-Walker & Andrew Campbell – main comments:

- Reports that the small business rate relief issue for self-catering businesses had improved in Gwynedd.- discussion around furloughed staff and how some might be released back as grounds/sites needed maintenance.
- the anti-tourism rhetoric around the second homes issue needed to be dropped – it was damaging.
- discussion around legal precedents for maintaining social distancing.
- AC fed back from the TIER meeting earlier in the week around potential for lifting restrictions;
- the package travel regulations would need to be changed; could caravan park licenses be extended? Would visitors from abroad arriving on ferries be quarantined for 14 days? Would WG consider support funding for Fishguard Harbour as it would not be receiving cruise ships this year? RH said WG was reviewing but he would find out.
- Wales Tourism Week was deferred and it would be reviewed at the end of May. AC suggested another bank holiday in the autumn.

VisitBritain – Celtic Manor Resort and ICCW - Ian Edwards – main comments were:

- echoed calls for clear messaging and the need to build public confidence.
- concerns that there would be no events until a vaccine was found.
- spoke to survey results which he circulated
- looking at what could possibly open – i.e. golf, with the right protocols. RH confirmed that the NGBs were all looking at this. And if some activities came back, could perhaps also bring back furloughed staff on a phased basis.
- Referred to the recovery plan he had shared with group – a mind map, to help find solutions.

Meeting (6) of Tourism Group – 10:30am, Friday, 1 May 2020

-All about confidence, h&S of staff and ultimately a vaccine.
-VB gave 4 key guidelines to Nigel Huddleston – health and safety, clear messaging, review of intelligent furloughing, and long term plan for market advantage. We did want to be behind curve – timing was all-important - needed to be ready to go to market.

UK Hospitality Cymru – Dave Chapman – main comments were:

-the issue of properties with a rateable value of £51K and above needed to stay on the agenda
-whilst tailor-made Welsh answers were usually a good thing, in this regard, messaging needed to be consistent across UK, especially around border areas.
-what would now become of the Tourism Action Plan? UKH want to be part of it.
-DC fed back on a national UKH meeting where a number of issues were discussed such as standard-led reopening, phased reintroduction, social distancing at back of house, each business to have H&S risk assessment procedures in place.
-once news of a relaxation of travel restrictions, we needed to be ready.

Sean Taylor – Tourism Industry Council – Zipworld - main comments were:

-ST made some similar points to others around consumer confidence and clear guidance and direction. JT said that VW had a big part to play in terms of messaging to sector.
-Zip World would not reopen until it could do the right thing for staff and customers.
-LvW added that VW was tracking consumer sentiment, focusing on community insight, flexibility would be required about restarting and there needed to be cancellation flexibility.

3. AOB/Next meeting.

All were thanked for a constructive meeting and we would return to the issues in a fortnight owing the Bank Holiday.

Alyson Burke

2 May 2020