

Meeting (15) of Tourism Group – 9:00, Thursday, 2 July 2020

Participants:

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

Version: AGREED

Main points of meeting

1. Update from Deputy Minister and Jason Thomas:

Jason Thomas explained that the main purpose of calling this week's meeting earlier than normal was to provide the group with an update on the opening of outdoor hospitality from 13 July, however it had already been leaked to the BBC the previous evening. The Minister (IR&WL) would provide all the detail about this in the daily press conference at lunchtime today. It was a cautious restart; there was no date yet provided for restarting indoor hospitality and the Minister would say that if the outdoor restart goes well then further consideration would be given to indoor hospitality restarting, provided the evidence supported it. The sector and the public would need to act appropriately and if things went well, we could move to the next phase.

The Minister would also be signalling that the date for reopening self-contained holiday accommodation would be brought forward from 13th to 11th July to tie-in better with the Saturday – Saturday booking regimes. Clarity would also be given to outdoor attractions reopening on 6 July; no news currently on indoor attractions but more would be said next week at the next 3-week review on 10 July, possibly including Camping. Rob Holt added how important it was to get this first bit right and hopefully there would be scope to move to the next phase. A working group was being established to look at indoor hospitality.

JT was painfully aware that August and the furlough tapering date were fast approaching and businesses were in the process of making decisions about staffing, and therefore all needed to be done as quickly but as thoroughly as possible to ensure a safe reopening.

2. Comments from the Sector

The following comments were made by the group in response to these developments:

Ian Edwards – was grateful for the news but wanted more as he was worried about the state of the industry. The situation was bad and that the bottom line was that Wales was so far behind given that all the other UK nations had published dates for reopening and it simply wasn't good enough that Wales did not have a date. IE had no plan for CMR, because without a date he couldn't plan and guests were booking elsewhere. IE was also deeply unhappy that golf for more than twoballs was not opening in Wales – this was now disadvantaging Welsh businesses. CMR could generate over £1million over the next 3 weeks from green-fees which could save jobs. There were people, families and livelihoods

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behind all of this. IE said the industry was being choked to death and asked more about the medical advice in which WG's rationale was being based.

-JT understood these points but there was another side to this and pointed to the reinstatement of lockdown in Leicester - and other areas were also on the brink of going back into lockdown. Wales planned and then announced and not the other way around. Wales was the safest nation. The thinking in terms of golf was purely to restrict gatherings. IE wanted to save livelihoods; WG wanted the same.

Michael Bewick – was interested in seeing the medical evidence and thought others would benefit too if it would help with understanding the WG thinking. MB wondered how indoor attractions were different to shops, and shops could open. Attractions were considering not opening at all this year and laying people off. Now and the next few weeks was the window where businesses were making their longer-term decisions. JT said that the evidence was already out there and was made clear that transmission indoors was riskier than outside and we needed to watch the cumulative impact of easing restrictions and be careful not to release all at once because if there were to be a second spike it would be easier to pinpoint which bit of unlocking was the “culprit”. Therefore the phased approach was the one being taken. At the UK Visitor Economy working group the previous day, both RH and Sean Taylor remarked how one of the main subjects of discussion was how were the sector supposed to deal with guests from Leicester and the others possibly returning to lockdown in the coming weeks.

-Mari Stevens said that she would have a chat with MB after the meeting as she wanted to explain that the CMO did understand the health vs economy argument and how the vitality of a strong economy was good for the nation's health and wellbeing.

-JT tried to reassure that all was not lost for indoor attractions and work was on-going now to feed into the 21-day review next week.

Anthony Rosser – conveyed how angry and upset he was at the forthcoming announcement. He could not sell hotel rooms once the date was passed; there evidence of hotels closing across the region and people going over the border to use Oswestry Golf Club as there was only limited service at Welshpool. AR suggested that the loss to the economy and people's livelihoods would far exceed the cost of lives lost ultimately given how long it would take the sector to properly recover. There was a discussion about why the mood off the meeting was so much worse given that Wales wasn't too far behind opening self-contained accommodation on 11 July and outdoor hospitality on 13 July. JT said that Wales being at a competitive disadvantage was a strong argument. AR said that theirs was a well-prepared, professional industry which could help mitigate problems in a safe way – but the industry was desperate for a date! JT said that Ministers would continue to unlock safely. AR understood this and did not envy WG with the decisions ahead but the industry needed some oxygen.

Andrew Campbell – endorsed some of the views that had been expressed but some of the feedback he'd been getting from WTA members was that maybe Wales had got the strategy right. But there were concerns about confused messaging and to have no dates had been the wrong thing to do. The change from 13 July to the 11th seemed arbitrary. AC also did not think that much self-catering accommodation would open on the 13th as it was not viable (for that week). JT said that businesses did not have to open on the 11th, they could open on the 13th or later. JT explained again that in Wales we planned and then announced, and not the other way around.

Dave Chapman – also supported earlier comments. He felt the mood change was because of the speed of change over a very short period of time. The point of the group was to make the most out of the positives and whilst we had the component parts, we did not have them in the right order and we hadn't made the point powerfully enough – we needed a timetable

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that worked. There also needed to be the reassurance of a package demonstrating how these businesses would be supported whilst they were unable to make money especially as the furlough arrangements would be drawing to a close. If this wasn't put in place then there would be a danger of random and illegal acts which could cause public order problems. If businesses were aware of this then it would help them plan and make informed decisions about their businesses. It would also help with wellbeing. JT said that WG was pressing the UK Government for financial support for the sector. RH also added that we needed to have a dedicated session on financial support to the sector so that we could have a proper think about what was actually needed. RH and Rhidian Morgan would do an initial think about what was being asked for and then would invite people to form a sub-group to discuss more fully.

Sean Taylor – said that in terms of his businesses, he felt disadvantaged as a destination – no-one could stay over, they couldn't camp, they couldn't have a beer or a coffee. ST had also had 20 people making enquires about jobs at ZipWorld as Snowdonia Adventure had made them redundant – the sector was fast losing skills and key workers. The way things were going it was looking unlikely that the development at Tower Colliery would go ahead. People were asking why was Wales different to England? ST also gave an account of Wales losing golfers to the Wirral. JT said he was hopeful that if this first phase went well and the R rate did not rise then other things

Adrian Greason-Walker – Questioned the science and the variables being used. AGW understood the question of science vs economics but he felt that WG were using pseudo-science made up on the hoof. We were now facing the prospect of a large number of people coming over the border (and uncontrolled border at that) who were not reading or were not aware of the Wales information – UK Government needed to do its part here too. AGW was of the view that businesses were being choked because we were trying to protect the vulnerable. Enforcement of the regulations would not be done by the authorities and as such the hospitality sector would be relied up on enforce this themselves anyway; so why not open up the sector anyway with the correct protocols in place? He also thought it was better too to show confidence in the industry by allowing them to reopen and manage the situation.

The **Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language** joined the meeting and JT summarised the discussion so far. The Minister said that she understood the pressure on the industry and that the clock was ticking and we only had one shot at summer. She felt it was so important to start opening up and building confidence with staff, customers and communities. Once confidence was back and people understood the protocols, we could then look to the next stage. The Minister was also aware that the furlough arrangements would be tapering in August and that for many in the industry it was a deadline of consequence. The FM had chosen 13th July to reopen deliberately to avoid a “super Saturday” and was following the SAGE advice to progress incrementally. The Minister asked the group not to lose hope, that we would be reopening carefully and taking steps after that to open more fully. [JT left for a different meeting; RH now chairing].

Steve Hughson - said that he understood the pressures but events was nowhere near the space in which tourism and hospitality found themselves. However SH was worried about the influx of visitors on 13 July and how it would be handled.

Rob Holt – asked DC, AC and IE to repeat the points they made earlier. The Minister said that she had heard the messages loud and clear (as previously minuted) and she would ensure that the strength of feelings being expressed was understood. -RH also mentioned that there was a Skills Taskforce meeting today and asked the group to consider what the key skills issues were and to send Rob an email. AR was keen for a skills body for the sector.

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Steven Jones – agreed that a support package was needed for the sector and LAs would want to help and deliver (target and design the scheme). SJ said it had been an effective, if challenging meeting today and upsetting at times, but he hoped we could get a good route map for the sector by the end of July. The LAs wanted to continue to be involved and were supportive.

Philippa George – said that she too agreed with most of the arguments today – she was expecting a public backlash. What would happen when it rained - how many could go inside? RH said that this was now being looked at through the working group. PG made a plea for some “hope” by providing some dates for the industry. RH thanked all for the emotional yet constructive meeting – things were massively challenging and both Ministers had heard it first-hand. We were now working towards the next 21 day review next week and all this would be fed-in.

The Deputy Minister said he would speak to the First Minister about how to respond to the strength of feeling today. The DM thanked all for their frankness and said all their efforts would not be lost.

3. **Next meeting:** Friday, 10 July 10:30am. Group asked to provide sector updates by 5pm on Thursday, 9 July.

Alyson Burke
3 July 2020