

Meeting (13) of Tourism Group – 16:00, Thursday, 18 June 2020

Version: AGREED

Meeting Participants at Annex A

Main points of meeting:

1. Introductions:

The Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism welcomed the First Minister to the group and thanked him for his time. Jason Thomas introduced the group to the FM and offered his sincere thanks to the group for meeting every Friday since the start of this crisis, how the group was always constructive and moved as a team. JT reported that the FM was aware of all the issues and he knew that all were keen to get a flavour of what the FM might announce the following day.

2. First Minister's comments:

The FM thanked the group for keeping him well-informed and said that he met regularly with the Minister IR&WL, the DM and with JT to check understanding around the concerns and damage to the visitor economy. However, this was a public health emergency and Covid-19 remained everywhere, and each day he had the painful duty of signing off on the number of deaths in Wales. However we were working hard to deal with it but we could not do anything which would impact on the little headroom we had. Therefore, the visitor economy was being looked at through that lens and before considering economic and community consent issues. Communities needed sensitive handling – if we reached the point where we could open up everything and then visitors were surrounded by “Go Home” signs, that image of Wales would be lasting. The FM said that the industry needed to take the community along with them.

The FM said that final decisions on the following day's announcement would be made later, following this meeting but he hoped to signal that the visitor economy could be opened in a careful way and ran through what would be signalled now but that the final decisions in the context of the virus would be taken closer to the time – and things were subject to change. Currently there was headroom, but it was easy to lose headroom and we needed to be careful that people's behaviour did not erode this. Steps would be taken in a graduated way with self-contained accommodation as a starting point – the virus thrived when people shared things, so if there was no sharing there were fewer risks. This would demonstrate to communities that are anxious that the industry was being careful and taking their concerns seriously.

Self-contained accommodation without shared facilities (static caravans, cottages, room-only hotels etc) would be signalled, and those businesses could now start to prepare actively to ensure the safeguards were in place, look to reopen supporting services and have conversations with the community. The FM was committed to doing this in a way that rescued something for the industry by offering the prospect of something and if all went well perhaps more could follow before the season's end. The DM thanked the FM for setting out the position and being mindful of the sector's concerns whilst balancing the public health concerns. JT invited comments/question from the group – these were as follows:

Andrew Campbell – Wales Tourism Alliance

- Thanked the FM for his consideration and positive message and referred to the respect the FM had garnered through the Nation throughout this crisis.
- Paid tribute to both Ministers and to Jason Thomas and his team.
- Reassured the FM that WTA members would work safely and work with communities, and guidance was ready to go in most cases.
- There had been a noticeable softening of community resistance as slowly people were realising the importance of tourism to the economy.

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-AC was pleased with the news as set out, with the caveat of being subject to change but asked the FM what were the timescales for opening other aspects of the sector?

- The FM said that he would set out a series of steps to be taken over the next 3 weeks and he would also look beyond 3 weeks – like he had done signalling to the retail sector that they may open and so on – they had done well and as a result the FM would be giving the retail sector the go ahead to open from Monday but with social distancing and other measures in place. This was how the FM would operate and would signal other parts of the economy in a similar way. The FM also said that not all of Wales was the same and some areas might have local issues and we would not necessarily have the same speed everywhere in lifting restrictions.

Dave Chapman – UK Hospitality Cymru

-Echoed the thanks and appreciation mentioned by AC. DC welcomed the proposed partial reopening, which was a good start but he saw it as the beginning of a 2 year process to protect wellbeing and jobs and communities, so we needed to plan ahead. UKH was working on an holistic plan but the continuation/tapering of furlough and tailored business support would be needed.

-DC offered for UKH to work in partnership with WG to help devise a greater argument to the UK Government for additional funding – UKH could help make the case.

-The FM said that guidance was very important for the wellbeing and reassurance of both employees and customers – preparation was everything.

- In terms of financial support, there was the £500million Economic Resilience Fund which was being used to plug the gaps in the UK package of measures, unprecedented as they were, and they were quick to act but the FM wanted the Chancellor to continue with furlough arrangements. The FM thanked DC for his offer of help.

Ian Edwards – Celtic Manor Resort – VisitBritain (Wales Representative)

-IE echoed the thanks and appreciation mentioned by others. IE said that all his comments were caveated with the fact that we were in a public health emergency and that we were operating, quite rightly, against that backdrop. The economy was in a bad place and IE said that he wanted to offer support to WG in making the case to the Chancellor. Peoples' lives and livelihoods were behind the figures quoted –3,500 possible redundancies at CMR alone.

-IE was grateful to WG for keeping us safe and getting communities to comply in the main. However, the doors could only be opened once we were confident that it was safe and responsible to do so. IE said that the sector needed WG's help to kick start the economy in Wales as the people would only come if they were told it was safe – consumer confidence was needed and the messaging now needed to provide that confidence.

-The FM said the situation was like walking a tightrope – on the one hand you wanted to say things were improving but did not want to risk an increase in the R number. The FM said that he would think about messaging.

-The FM referred to the VB holiday at home message encouraging “staycations” and how this would be good for Wales and we could make much of it. JT said that both Northern Ireland and Scotland would also be campaigning similarly.

Paula Ellis – Chair, South West Wales Tourism Forum

-JT introduced PE who he felt should have special recognition for dealing with some very difficult local circumstances in carrying out her role as chair of the forum. PE thanked JT and said it was an honour to serve the region, but it had been challenging but she was determined to continue to represent the industry in the South West Region. PE thanked the FM for talking to the group and for outlining positively what might be happening over the coming weeks.

-PE sought clarity on how the five mile restriction would work in synergy with sectors of the industry opening.

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-The FM said that once he says we were opening the visitor economy then “stay local” was over and the FM would give notice to this effect, and again, it would only happen if all the evidence supported this move.

-Steve Hughson – Chair, Mid Wales Tourism Forum

-SH was grateful for all that the FM was doing for the tourism, hospitality and events sector and for the support and leadership. However some business had had to make redundancies and close business. As such longer-term plans for support were needed: furlough needed to be extended or at least retained in sectors adversely effected.

-SH also asked about representations with UK Ministers and the outlook for events where business may not get the chance to make any income in 2020 or 2021.

-The FM said that he took all the opportunities available to engage with Westminster. The FM met regularly with the Secretary of State for Wales who had a seat at UK Cabinet. The FM had a meeting planned with Michael Gove the following day about a range of matters including the 2m rule. FM was hopeful of a pattern of engagement, but had also spoken to the Chancellor and Ken Skates fed into BEIS. The DM added that he had an excellent relationship with Nigel Huddleston at DCMS.

-The FM confirmed that events were not on the immediate agenda. There had been some mention of a culture package from the UK Government (for which we were hopeful of Barnett consequential) but this had not been forthcoming as yet. The FM was hopeful for a package to sustain the events and arts sector but there would not be a return for mass gathering anytime soon. The CMO had confirmed that with concerts and gigs, noise was a big factor in transmission of the disease, because people got closer to speak up during a conversation. A resurgence happened in some parts of Europe because that sector moved too quickly.

-SH thanked the FM for his honesty and his time and said that the group was ready and waiting to help support WG. The DM pointed to the importance of RWAS to Wales.

-JT touched on the Cultural Recovery Fund and said we were pressing DCMS for more details.

Michael Bewick – Chair, North Wales Tourism Forum

-MB too echoed the thanks and appreciation voiced by others. MB said that they were extraordinarily united in the north in feeling protected, but business owners were having a desperate time and their prospects were not good. However MB wanted to reassure the FM that they were preparing in the way the FM was signalling, starting at a low level, speaking to communities and building confidence. Business owners were keen to open if they could keep open. MB asked the FM about the prospects of the opening of indoor attractions, bars, restaurants etc.

-The FM said that often signals from trusted organisations went a long way – community councils, local authorities, Trade Unions etc - where they send a signal that that they have been engaged by WG or a local business etc.

-The FM said he would like to have a timetable for bars and restaurants but wanted to use the next 3 weeks for more conversations. There were arguments for easing outdoor establishments earlier than indoor. But indoor was harder. Would consider offering more of a timetable for that part of the economy.

Steven Jones – WLGA

-Following on from the discussion on cafes, bars and restaurants, SJ said that LAs were keen to have a safe and phased reopening. LAs were keen to develop a roadmap with WG on public realm matters such as car parks and toilets etc.

-The FM said that there had been extensive conversations with WLGA, with the Leader attending Cabinet twice a week. FM said that if the visitor economy was to be opened up then LAs would need to open supporting services. FM referred to guidance drawn up with LAs to help with the public realm matters. He also said the Minister Housing and Local Government met the Leaders every week and different cabinet member at various times.

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The FM said that LAs had done a tremendous job at local level to mobilise partnerships. The Minister IR&WL and the DM would be meeting Local Authority Leaders the following day.

-Before he left the meeting, the FM thanked the group for its work and only felt comfortable sharing his latest thoughts with them because of the nature of the group. He asked that they listen carefully to the announcement the following day in case of any changes. The FM also urged the group to continue its conversations and discussions.

Philippa George – Chair, South East Wales Tourism Forum

-PG endorsed all the thanks to Ministers and JT's team.

-PG welcomed the probable relaxation of the restrictions around accommodation with non-shared facilities and said that communities would welcome a smooth start. PG asked what the definition of self-contained/non-shared facilities meant. JT read from a draft definition explaining what would be covered.

-PG mentioned people were telling her that sole traders/non-limited companies would not qualify for Phase 2 ERF funding which was devastating for them. RM said that there continued to be some gaps and funds were finite. It was hoped we would receive more consequential funding from UK Government.

Anthony Rosser – UK Hospitality Cymru

-AR thanked the group for a wonderful meeting. Whilst the health emergency was paramount, staff and communities were also important. Earlier in the day AR had had held some staff redundancy consultations as things had reached that point. AR said that sometime even the simplest things can make a difference i.e. lifting the 2m rule to 1m which would help boost income. The DM said that the UK Government understood this point.

-MIRWL said that UK Government was leading on this but it was important to remember that the virus could resurge and it would be difficult to have to return to 2m after moving to 1m – this was tricky to manage and it needed to be done carefully.

-MIRWL also said that through talking to LAs and communities there was definitely a sea-change in attitude about re-opening the visitor economy. It was fundamental to get messaging right and communities on board. We did not want to see hostility directed at visitors which could have a lasting effect.

-The DM wondered if it would be prudent to publish the scientific evidence around the 2m-1m issue and he would raise this with the FM.

JT ended the meeting by thanking all for a constructive meeting which had covered a lot of ground. JT urged the group to continue its various levels of engagement as it help to inform the sector and WG.

Date of Next meeting: Friday, 26 June 2020, 10:30am

Alyson Burke
22 June 2020

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Annex A

Participants:

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