

Attendees:

Jason Thomas	WG	Sean Taylor	UK TIC Rep
Steffan Roberts	WG	Dave Chapman	UK Hospitality
Rob Holt	WG	Steve Hughson	MW Forum Chair
Heledd Owen	WG	Stephen Jones	WLGA
Alex Bevan	WG	Michael Bewick	NW Forum Chair
Ian Edwards	VB Board Rep	Josh Green	BB&PA
Suzy Davies	WTA	Dan Warder	WIRC

1. Welcome and Introduction

Jason Thomas starts the meeting by welcoming Suzy Davies to the group and congratulating on her appointment at the WTA. Today’s meeting is to get a sense from the sector of how things are looking for the next few months. JT mentions the IGTM and how the ICC did an incredible job hosting and seeing delegates being incredibly responsible and safe and thanks Ian Edwards and the team. He continues by stating there is still significant pressure on NHS and looking at this extremely closely within the 21-day review cycle.

2. Reflections on Covid pass and Update on the 21 day review

Steffan Roberts discusses the uncertain times with the case rates at 650/100,000. Health Minister has spoken this week about the control plan and the levels we have from Covid stable to Covid urgent and the tools if we reach those points to introduce restrictions. Unlikely at this stage, lot of uncertainty as there are challenges that could raise with variants. He continues that we will remain at alert level 0, maximising the tools and reinforcing existing measures e.g. encouraging people to take boosters, encourage WFH and face coverings. Cabinet is still discussing and will be beyond next week. Ministers are keen to seek the views from the group with the focus on feedback in relation to the Covid pass.

Rob Holt discusses the feedback from the event sector from the football matches and Ffos las racecourse. Motorpoint Arena have been feeding back that large majority are entering with the pass or LFT with only a majority saying they’ve not heard of the requirements. Feedback generally from the industry is that they will take the Covid pass over 2 meter (2m) distancing. Lot of comms around the next few weeks with football and rugby matches in Cardiff and will be challenging. The feedback from UK buyers and operators at IGTM was that staff shortages was an issues across the UK. International delegates at IGTM are used to stricter regimes in their own countries so were very compliant.

3. Observations and comments from the Stakeholders

- The industry needs more information from Welsh Government (WG) on implementation and clarification e.g. hotel pack that looks at how they handle Christmas events.

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- Wider communication, loss of trade in the city centre with fragile confidence, Christmas season everyone will be out there and it will be safeguarded but need to make sure that happens.
- From the pub perspective no reports of many issues, pubs have changed their operating habits and it's easier for pubs than venues. Local Authorities issue with timings and rules, however was a misunderstanding.
- Case numbers rising are having a direct impact on foot fall, trade over summer was good but not back to pre-pandemic, seeing a sharp drop off as the weather started to turn September to October with a drop of 15-20% straight away and it's going to get worse.
- Licencing leeway was touched up on with WG understanding around staffing issues. Recognition on the skills gap – matching up the skills and demand. Pubs closed at the start of the week due to lack of the staff across the board especially in kitchens.
- Highlighted the need for continued effective communications around 21 day review outcomes.
- Planning for next year is highlighted as there are fears from the industry. How are hotels, tourist attractions etc. going to operate successfully next year when it seems impossible to recruit staff. Need to start focusing on this right now as a key strategic issue.
- Concerns about the response of the communities, feeling battered after the summer. Importance of considering through winter to spring a communication plan which looks at the level of reassurance to provide to the communities.
- Events sector supports Covid pass and need to make it work for the events who haven't had a change to operate yet. International travel and people across the border is major for large events and need to think about.
- Need more comms, intelligence from events that's happened is key which will help us plan the response.
- Shout out to the Local Authorities in Powys who have been fantastic in supporting events.
- Not living in the real world still on the back of support schemes, next year will be more challenging than this year, still in a period of uncertainty, comment in the news with Covid being with us for a while longer. Suspect no support so need to start looking and being imaginative of supporting the sector.
- Desire over the summer has gone have to be more proactive to get trade in and look for further opportunities.
- Concerns of the case rate and worry of going back to the last 18 months, it's reiterated to ensure we have a plan in place. Places in Europe are shutting down, Moscow has just gone into lockdown for a month. Rules in Canada are hard and fast – however, understand the issues around this with human rights.
- Opinions on Covid passes rather than the 2m rule to be introduced in more visitor economy settings.
- How can we planning for next year when we don't know what's going on. Can't write a budget, can't employ staff even if you wanted to – major issues around this. Need a sensible line to get us through winter and then beyond.

- Queries from smaller attractions indoor and outdoor if the Covid pass system will come down to them.
- Visitor irritation, Covid fatigue and enforcement fatigue is still really live and causing stress.
- As much heads up with regards restrictions that may be incoming as we need to plan and a request for a 4 Nations approach

4. Revised Covid Control Plan for the Winter

- Reiterating delicate time with business rates in March. Importance of helping the Visitor Economy to be sustainable, if WG can't help with VAT need to let them know so that they can plan. Welsh economy has fared better than English and Scottish economy with local domestic tourism at 115% of previous years where England/Scotland are at around 80%.
- Incentive on Business Rates suggest tapering rate over time to get us away from a crash in April.
- VAT campaign – helpful if the Minister would support with appeals to Westminster to get the rate maintained.
- Businesses trading sub viably as they've had to close some parts of the businesses down due to staffing, and has led their percentage viability down to negative. Going into the winter, bound to be further sub-viability and businesses in critical positions. Contingency fund for businesses who can demonstrate that they need a bridge through to Easter or an innovative grant process to get ready for Easter.
- Request for WG to be resistant imposing additional costs with fuel etc. downward pressure on business.
- Grants from WG have been generous, could create further targeted support for small scale infrastructure e.g. replacing gas boiler.
- In relation to partnership working, seem to be heavy on local government and trade unions, need a clear steer on how private sector is going to be influential and involved in decisions. Important to not get downgraded as a sector.
- Need to make the most of the domestic market.

Officials discuss the comprehensive spending review and budget announcement on 27th October, which sets out the budget for the coming years. Economy Minister is aware of the issues that have been highlighted. WG is proud of the social partnership model, which is about public sector, trade unions and private sector working closely together. Significant autumn and winter campaign of scale going forward. Investing heavily *This is Autumn: This is Wales* campaign with high profile sites in London, promoting Addo and travelling safely. In relation to financial support, in the next meeting will bring colleagues to discuss opportunities for support **(Action)**. Commitment with the tourism budgets for next year, will work closely with the group on priorities. Feedback from colleagues in DCMS around CSR is going to be challenging with significant cuts, that's the reality as we move forward. Opportunities this financial year if we can bring forward investment to help the industry for future years.

5. AOB

- Guidance to working in hospitality and tourism needs to be extend to events, first time across the organisations seeing a churn of staff that isn't usual. Example of a major catering contactor for the summer no longer trading which adds events to the staffing challenge.

RH explains that security and volunteers at events don't want to come back, who are key to events and need to look at a new event strategy with the skills side.

JT said maximising the opportunity is the WG major commitment with 125,000 apprentices. As the sector is engaging as we implement that commitment, we can get more people into the sectors.

- Stakeholders commented how incredibly lucky they are to be engaging with senior officials, putting the case over to Ministers and thank for the support.

JT closes the meeting by thanking all for the time and engagement and another meeting will be held next week.

Next Meeting 28th October